

JOURNAL OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS

SUMMER 1998 VOLUME XXIV, NUMBER 1



MUSEUM OF EARLY SOUTHERN DECORATIVE ARTS

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THE JOURNAL
OF EARLY SOUTHERN
DECORATIVE ARTS



SUMMER 1998
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Contents

MARK REINBERGER

- Robert Wellford, Composition Ornament Maker of Philadelphia:
His Work in the Southeast

I

Book Reviews

DAVID BARQUIST

- Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture
1680-1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*

68

PHILIP ZIMMERMAN

- Nancy Goynes Evans, *American Windsor Furniture:
Specialized Forms*

74



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Robert Wellford, Composition
Ornament Maker of Philadelphia
His Work in the Southeast

MARK REINBERGER

COMPOSITION ORNAMENT was an important aspect of Federal period interior design.¹ Composition is a substance made of very finely ground lime, resin or oil, and glue. Mixed as a paste, it is forced into carved molds. Once dry, the material is extremely hard, which allows it to take a very fine level of detail, much finer than plaster. Glued to mantelpieces, doorways, and other woodwork, composition ornament conveys the richness of hand carving at a fraction of the price.

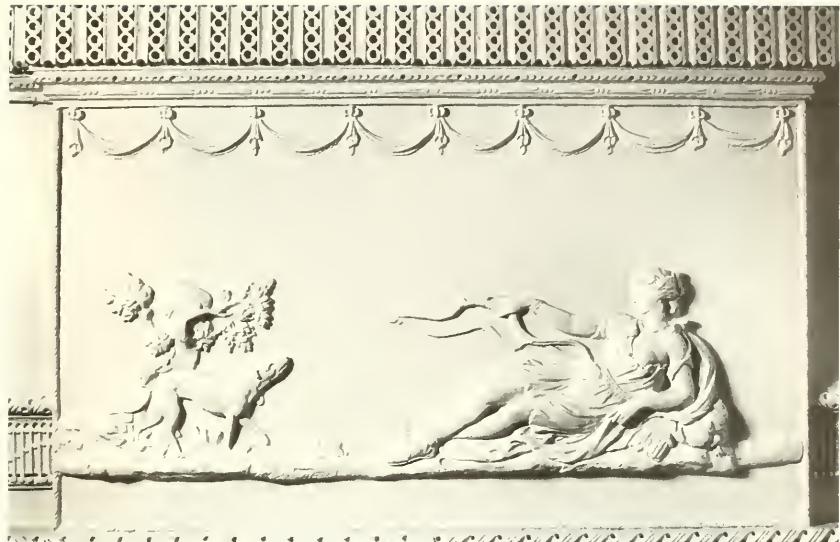
Although the basic recipe and molding techniques had been known for centuries, the craft proliferated with the ascendancy of the Adam style in England in the 1760s and in America at the end of the eighteenth century. Robert Adam often used composition ornament for the delicate and repetitive ornament that characterized his style. Adam employed George Jackson to mold ornament, and by 1780 Jackson had founded the independent London firm of George Jackson and Sons.² (It continues to produce composition ornament to this day.) Other composition ornament makers also emerged after 1780, one of them being John Jacques, who first appeared in 1781 as providing "artificial ornaments" for Inverary Cas-

tle.¹ He is mentioned in records from that time until 1808 as a carver and gilder and a seller of picture frames, but mostly as a maker of composition ornament working in London. By 1801 he claimed a Royal appointment.²

Out of Jacques' London shop came Robert Wellford, the subject of this study. Wellford's work has long been known to historians of architecture and the decorative arts and to antique collectors, particularly those concerned with the American Federal period. Trained in England, Wellford was the leading American practitioner of the craft of composition ornament making. He ran the longest-lived American shop in the field and has the largest extant identifiable *oeuvre* in the craft. To date, approximately 120 surviving mantels or other elements of architectural woodwork have been identified as having Wellford ornament (fig. 1). Their original locations range geographically from northern New Jersey to Georgia.

Fiske Kimball's early *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* provided a brief discussion of Wellford, and Henry J. Kauffman's popular *The American Fireplace* also gave a quick summary of Wellford's career and reproduced some documents. Several Wellford pieces and a brief discussion of his career also appeared in Bea Garvan's *Federal Philadelphia, 1785–1825: The Athens of the Western World*.³ Despite this attention, the importance of Wellford's career has never been fully appreciated, and no attempt has been made to systematically study or catalog his work.

The large amount of surviving material by Wellford is matched by the scope of ornaments represented. At least forty different ornamental scenes or motifs can be surely tied to Wellford's shop, and another twenty can be associated with a high degree of probability. These motifs vary from purely ornamental arabesques and foliage to elaborate scenes drawn from history and mythology. In addition to architectural woodwork, Wellford's motifs appear on ironwork, for he ornamented molds for ironmongers (fig. 2), often using similar motifs to his composition ornament molds.⁴ Whether on woodwork



1. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, the goddess Diana. The Read House, New Castle, Delaware, 1803. HOA 12", WOA 28". Reproduced courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware. Photograph by the author.

or iron, Wellford's work constitutes one of the largest assemblages of neoclassical ornament and allegory in America.

Composition ornament was as popular in the Southeast as in any other part of the country. (Appendix III contains a list of houses with signed or firmly attributed Wellford ornament in the Southeast.) Indeed more Federal period composition ornament survives in the Southeast than in any other region. Charleston, South Carolina, in particular, was fond of composition ornament, although there are surviving examples all over the region. Wellford appears to have been the most important single supplier of composition ornament to the southern United States, and his work can most easily be traced because he often attached signature plaques to his ornaments. However, the work of other composition makers can also be dis-

2. Iron stove with decoration by Robert Wellford from the Isabella Furnace, probably Catoctin, Maryland, c. 1814. Side view.
HOA 24½" (not including base), WOA 28½". MESDA acc. 2498; MRF 13.158. The battle scene and frame of foliage are similar to the mantel ornament in figure 19.



cerned in the region. For example, in the upper South, George Andrews of Baltimore and later Washington, D.C., supplied ornament to Virginia, Maryland, and Washington. Several other sources of composition ornament, most notably London imports, were available to Charlestonians.

WELLFORD'S CAREER

Even before Robert Wellford arrived in Philadelphia, a succession of firms there had briefly carried on the composition ornament trade. William Zane & Company, and before them Zane, Chapman

& Company, had carried on the composition ornament business as a sideline to their main trade of ironmongery since 1794. In the beginning they imported ornaments, but by 1795 they had bought the American Manufactory of Composition Ornaments from William Poynell & Company, who had established it about the same time.⁷ Advertisements in 1795 for both Poynell and Zane & Chapman make the same claim:

This manufactory is conducted under the direction of an able artist, late from London, who learned under, and followed the business there many years in company with, the original inventor of the art. The several patterns from the newest designs are of masterly workmanship, and executed at a great expense, under his immediate inspection, forming altogether as complete a set of patterns as the London artist could procure.⁸

This earlier artisan is unknown, although the “original inventor of the art” refers to John Jacques.

Robert Wellford seems to have followed the example of the earlier Jacques journeyman in emigrating to America from London. He arrived in Philadelphia in 1797 and was naturalized there two years later. Born in 1775 in Middlesex County, England, now part of greater London,⁹ he apprenticed with Jacques from the age of twelve or thirteen and would have been nineteen or twenty when he became a journeyman, the usual ages for these steps in the education of a skilled craftsman.¹⁰ The first documented proof of his activity in Philadelphia appears in 1797, when signed a receipt for Zane & Chapman.¹¹ He was almost certainly the person mentioned in that firm’s January 1798 advertisement, which states:

Zane, Chapman & Co. — Composition Ornaments. Whereas the co-partnership of Zane, Chapman & Co. being dissolved by mutual consent, the public are hereby notified that the Manufactory of said ornaments is now carried on by William Zane & Co. at the sign of the canister and handsaw, No. 23, south Second street, Philadelphia; and executed by a person immediately from London, who has produced sufficient vouchers of his serving a seven years’ regular apprenticeship, and worked several years as a journeyman to the celebrated [John] Jacques of

London, the inventor of the art, whereby they flatter themselves they have it in their power to give satisfaction to their friends in this line, having lately added a number of new models and designs to their former stock, which is very extensive.¹²

The advertisement implies that Wellford brought molds with him from London (the “new models and designs” mentioned).

Wellford’s immigration to Philadelphia in 1797 was an excellent career move. The construction trades throughout the country were flourishing; Philadelphia, as the nation’s former capital, its largest and chief manufacturing city, and the center of banking and finance, provided specialized building materials and skilled labor for at least the mid-Atlantic and southern states. By contrast, the building trades in England were crowded, and construction had slowed with the wars associated with the French Revolution.¹³

By this time, the Adamesque Federal style of architecture and decoration had become firmly entrenched in America, generating an abundant demand for the kind of delicate ornament for which composition was well suited. Moreover, the field was not crowded in America; indeed, throughout his career, Wellford was one of only a few major composition ornament manufacturers in the United States. Wellford would have been aware of current conditions in the composition business in America through Jacques’ shop and might even have known the artisan who had preceded him at Zane & Chapman.

Wellford stayed with Zane until the latter disappeared from the directories at the turn of the century, at which time Wellford first appeared on his own as a “composition manufacturer” at 49 Chestnut Street in the heart of Philadelphia’s old commercial district, not far from the Delaware River waterfront. The earliest accounts for an independent Wellford were for Powelton, the Powel family’s villa in Blockley (now West Philadelphia): “£7/10/0 paid Robert Wellford for ornamenting four chimneys.”¹⁴

Wellford’s career flourished in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and he became a substantial citizen among fellow

prosperous artisans. By 1803 Wellford had moved from Chestnut Street around the corner to 42 South Third Street and in 1804 briefly took a partner named Anderson.¹⁵ By 1807 Wellford had dropped Anderson, moved again (this time to South Eighth Street below Walnut), and had established the definitive version of his company, Robert Wellford's Original American Manufactory of Composition Ornaments. He may have chosen this name to counter claims of craftsmen from other cities. Three years later Wellford and his wife, Martha, bought from Edward Burd a lot on the east side of South Tenth Street south of Locust Street and built a house and shop.¹⁶ He remained at this location for the rest of his active life.

As an independent artisan, Wellford worked hard to develop his business, employing all the techniques of advertising current in his day. It might be supposed that he utilized that oldest of advertisements, the shop sign, to display his skill. His house and shop were filled with examples of his work.¹⁷ He also strove to develop markets outside Philadelphia, especially to the west and south. Even before Wellford's arrival, Zane & Chapman had made a start toward developing wider markets. To reach these markets Wellford advertised profusely in newspapers, in handbills, and in that relatively new type of publication, the city directory and advertiser.

Wellford's first handbill appeared in 1801, when he went out on his own. It was his most prolix, indeed, a "manifesto of composition ornament":

TO THE PUBLIC,

From the remotest ages of antiquity, Carving hath been esteemed an essential decoration to the works of magnificence; with civilization and knowledge, dawnd this liberal art; As they gradually reached perfection it arose to meridian splendor, which the beautiful vestiges of Temples and Statues, do evince, and will long perpetuate the just celebrity of Greek and Roman artists.

In the modern buildings of this country are specimens of admirable skill which prove the rising merit of American artists.

A cheap substitute for wood carving has long been desirable for some

situations, particularly enriched mouldings, etc. and various were the attempts to answer the purpose, the last and most successful is usually termed Composition Ornaments. It is a cement of solid and tenacious materials, which, when properly incorporated and pressed into moulds, receives a fine relief; in the drying it becomes hard as stone, strong, and durable, so as to answer most effectually the general purpose of Wood Carving, and not so liable to chip. This discovery was rudely conducted for some time, owing to Carvers declining every connection with it, till, from its low price, it encroached so much upon their employment, that several embarked in this work, and by their superior talents greatly improved it.

The Subscriber being brought up in the art of Carving and Composition Ornament making in all its branches, and practiced in designing and cutting off reversed Moulds, etc. he has been induced to tender his services to the public in this line. His hope of success is founded on the execution of the origin of his patterns: The great encouragement with which he has already been favored with, will call forth the utmost of his exertions to improve the art to greater perfection.

And he trusts there will be found little difference in expence, and his only contention will be for superiority of workmanship.

The invention of Composition Ornament offers a good embellishment at a moderate price, it resembles in some degree the art of printing and engraving; its utility must therefore be obvious to many, and it is hoped will long receive due patronage from such liberal minds of refined taste as can best discern any efforts of improvement, to merit which shall be the assiduous endeavour of,

Their obedient servant,
ROBERT WELLFORD
April 6th, 1801.¹⁸

The handbill went on to follow the wording of an earlier advertisement of Zane & Chapman's that referred to orders from the hinterlands, free printed directions, and a list of references.¹⁹ However, its sweeping prose was new and indicates Wellford's ambition to promote composition ornament far beyond what Zane & Chapman had envisioned. This attempted elevation of the craft is understandable: Wellford, a trained carver and ornament maker, was attempt-

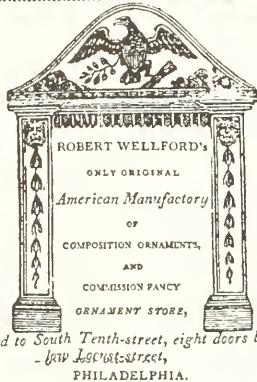
ing to make a living solely by a specialty craft in a market relatively unfamiliar with his product. By contrast, composition ornament merely formed a sideline to Zane & Chapman's ironmongery business. Wellford apparently also wanted to establish composition-ornament making as something akin to a fine art by linking it with both sculpture and architecture.

In 1804 Wellford also issued another advertisement in which he claimed to have made a new stock of molds and designs. This broadside, illustrated with a mantel-like form decorated with composition ornament, indicated possible uses for his ornament. This advertisement covered little new ground, although it did mark the beginning of sidelines to the central trade of composition ornaments for architectural purposes, in this case ornaments for ship cabins and patterns for iron stove molds. He also tried to entice redecorators to ornament older mantels, something that may have happened often.

After the move to South Tenth Street in 1810, Wellford reissued the advertisements mentioned above, adding "Commission Fancy Ornament Store" to the title (fig. 3). He also noted the sale of marble mantel ornaments and the bronzing of statues.²⁰ He issued new advertisements in subsequent years. In the 1818 *Paxton's Philadelphia Annual Advertiser* he ran an advertisement (fig. 4) decorated with an American eagle that stressed "Stove Patterns and Models generally" and mentioned another line of products:

Ornamental Roses, Suitable for ceilings of rooms or entries, of various sizes and patterns, warranted durable, may be readily fixed by screwing them up to the joists, which prevents making dirt in finished buildings by using those recommended. Specimens may be seen at the manufactory.²¹

This represented a foray into new territory, since plaster rosettes were generally fixed to plaster ceilings, with composition used only on wood.²² Wellford's addition of new lines probably reflects the beginning of the shift from the Federal style to the more chaste Greek Revival, which was to reduce the demand for most composition ornament applied to architectural woodwork.



Is removed to South Tenth-street, eight doors below Loeust-street,

PHILADELPHIA.

Containing a variety of modern and original Patterns for decorating Room, Bed, and Window Cornices, and Friezes, Architectures, Pilasters, Shutters, Panel Boxes, Surface and Cornice Mouldings, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite Columns, and many other Ornaments suitable for the inside of public or private buildings, answering effectually, the general intention of wood carving.

ROBERT WELLFORD informs his friends, that he has made a large addition to his moulds and designs, having brought up to the art of Carving and Composition Ornamentation, all the latest patterns practised in designing and cutting of reversed moulds, &c. He hopes henceforth to have it in his power to supply any demands that may be made, in ornaments of real good quality and neatly finished; and which he is determined to dispose of at reduced prices. Ships' Cabins, and old Mantles elegantly decorated, and Ornaments fixed on stove patterns to suit the fancy... Orders from any part of the continent punctually attended to, executed with elegance and despatch, and a generous allowance made to wholesale purchasers, with printed directions for fixing the composition, gratis.

CERTIFICATE.

WE the subscribers, house carpenters, hereby certify, That we have, divers times, made use of Composition Ornament manufactured at this Manufactory, and are of opinion, that they are equal in quality to any imported.

Philip Justus, David Grey, Alexander Steel, Thomas Castairs, John Crean, Abraham Colladay, Joseph Randal, Edward Garrigues, Joseph Worrel, George Summers, Kintzing Pritchett, John Smith, Benjamin Woolston, Jacob Lybrand, Jacob Vogdes, Thomas Kingston, P. L. Berry, Michael Baker, and W. R. Pritchett, Ship Joiner.

Derbyshire Spar, Alabaster, and Marble Mould Ornaments repaired, as well as Bronzing of Statues, Busts, &c.

N. B. To Country Customers... By applying to the Philadelphia Director, or to Carpenters, Carvers, or Gilders, in this City, the manufactory may be readily found.

JOHN SWEENEY, PRINTER
NO. 317, ARCH STREET.

3. Robert Wellford handbill advertising his wares, Philadelphia, PA, c. 1811. Stauffer Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



R. WELLFORD'S ORIGINAL PHILADELPHIA MANUFACTORY OF Composition Ornaments &c.

No. 145, south Tenth Street (below Loeust).

R. W. has established this manufactory at great expense, and, anxious to please, is continually adding new patterns to his superior collection; he embraces this opportunity of tendering his thanks to his numerous friends for past favours, and pledges himself to use his utmost endeavours to merit a continuance. He has always on hand an extensive assortment of Ornaments suitable for the decoration of the inside of public or private buildings, answering effectually the general intention of wood carving. Warranted to stand if not properly fixed.

Stove Patterns, and Models generally,

For iron founders, made and ornamented in the most modern style; ships' cabins, old mantle-pieces, &c. fancifully decorated.

Ornamental Roses,

Suitable for ceilings of rooms or entries, of various sizes and patterns, warranted durable, may be readily fixed by screwing them up to the joists, which prevents making dirt in finished buildings, by using those recommended. Specimens may be seen at the manufactory.

Orders for exportation executed with neatness and despatch.—A generous allowance made to wholesale purchasers.—Printed directions will be given for tempering and fixing the ornaments.

4. Robert Wellford advertisement from Paxton's Philadelphia Annual Advertiser, Philadelphia, 1818. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

For sales outside of Philadelphia, Wellford developed a network of distributors (carpenters, merchants, and others) who sold his products. Zane, Chapman, & Wellford had such an agent in Baltimore, Thomas & Caldecleugh, who later printed a version of a Wellford advertisement.²³ Wellford is known to have had several agents. For example, the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, merchant Frederick Kelker advertised:

Wellford's Warranted Composition
Ornaments

An elegant assortment of *Wellford's warranted composition ornaments*, with printed directions for tempering and fixing the same, for sale at the manufacturer's price, at the store of

F. Kelker

Harrisburgh, August 10th, 1812.²⁴

The architect and master carpenter Stephen Hills acted as Wellford's promoter in Lancaster and later Harrisburg. Wellford added Hills' name to the list of subscribing carpenters in his 1801 advertisement, and Hills used Wellford ornament in many of his own buildings, including the Diller House in Lancaster, his own house in Harrisburg (the Hills-Haldeman House, on Front Street, c. 1810), and possibly the Pennsylvania State House—which would be the only known use of Wellford's ornament in a public building.²⁵

In Petersburg, Virginia, the newspaper the Virginia *Apollo* acted as Wellford's agent. In 1807 Wellford placed the "Remotest ages of antiquity" advertisement in the Apollo, noting that the newspaper would handle any orders with dispatch.²⁶

Known examples of Wellford agents lie along three well-established trade routes. Two were over land: the road to Lancaster and the west of Pennsylvania, and the inland route through Virginia and north-central and western North Carolina. Both routes were natural for a Philadelphia businessman.²⁷ Well into the nineteenth century, Philadelphia provided most of the manufactured specialty goods for all of Pennsylvania.²⁸ The inland southern route was also well established. When William Poyntell ran the American Manufactory of

Composition Ornaments, he had advertised in Richmond, Virginia, and Halifax, North Carolina, on this route.²⁹ The end of the route was marked by the 1799 Steele House in Salisbury, North Carolina, built by John Steele, an official with the federal government then located in Philadelphia. Documents of Wellford's sale to Steele survive (see Appendix II).

Wellford's third large market outside of the Delaware Valley was Charleston, which was as fond of composition ornament as it had been of carved architectural enrichments in the colonial period. Wellford's goods reached Charleston by coastal shipping; he had at least one agent there. Archibald Whitney, importer, advertised in 1807:

Fancy Ornaments. The Subscriber has just received per ship Agnes, Capt. Bunce, from Philadelphia, an extensive assortment of the latest fashion American Manufactured Composition Ornaments, suitable for the inside of public and private buildings, etc.

The above will be disposed of at Philadelphia cash prices, at No. 1 Market Street.³⁰

Although Wellford does not appear by name, several features of the advertisement point to him: he was the only major ornament maker at the time in Philadelphia, his business was the American Manufactory (a title trumpeted by the advertisement), and, once again, the price was to be the retail Philadelphia price. Further proof of Wellford's presence in Charleston lies in the fact that his signature plates, unique among composition ornament makers in America, appear on more mantel tablets in Charleston than any other city. Wellford did not include signature plaques on ornament sold in Philadelphia; he did not need to, since he was well known there. Outside Philadelphia, signature plaques were another method of advertisement. This same differentiation has been observed in furniture makers; for example, the cabinetmakers of Newport, Rhode Island, appended labels only to pieces shipped outside of the colony.³¹

THE TECHNIQUE OF MAKING
COMPOSITION ORNAMENT

In theory, the craft of composition ornament making is deceptively simple.³² Recipes for composition varied, but Minard LaFever, following Nicholson's *New Practical Builder*, gave this typical one:

The material alluded to is of a brownish colour, exceedingly compact, and, when completely dry, very strong. It is composed of powdered whitening, glue in solution, and linseed oil; the proportions of which are to two pounds of whirening, one pound of glue, and half a pound of oil. These are placed in a copper and heated, being stirred with a spatula till the whole becomes incorporated. It is then suffered to cool and settle; after which it is taken and laid upon a stone, covered with powdered whitening, and beaten till it becomes of a tough and firm consistence. It is then put by for use, and covered with wetted cloths to keep it fresh.³³

In Wellford's time, molds for composition were made of dense woods such as pear or boxwood, metals such as brass, and sulphur.³⁴ Wood molds were most common and survive in the greatest numbers. Evidence suggests that Wellford primarily used brass molds, which would give the sharpest detail, something readily observable in Wellford's ornament. An advertisement by Thomas & Caldbleugh of Baltimore for Zane & Chapman in 1799, after Wellford joined the firm, states:

This composition is made under the direction of one of the manufacturers who learned the business of the celebrated Jacques, of London, original inventor of the art — the designs are all in the newest style, chiefly cut on brass; and the composition will be found equal in quality to that of any imported.³⁵

Further, Wellford advertised that he had crucibles for brass founders (probably of graphite) for sale, suggesting that his shop had the means to produce molds in brass.

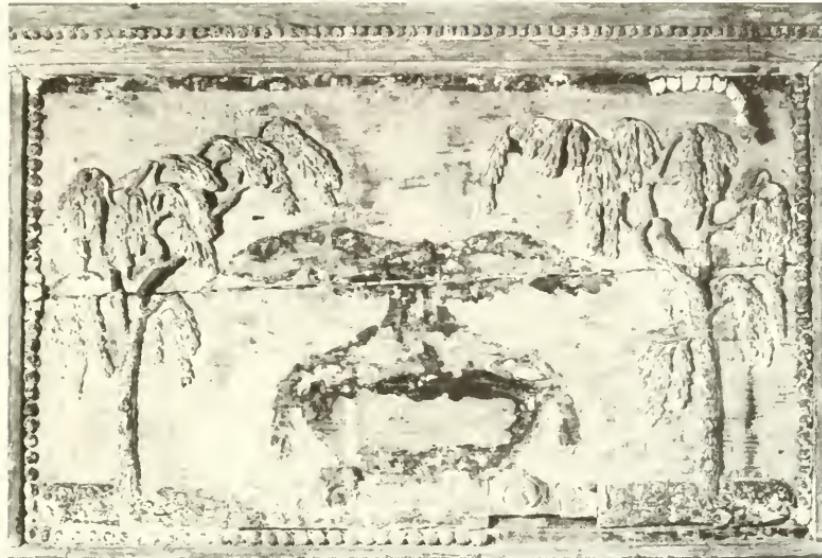
We can probably assume that Wellford's working technique followed fairly closely that outlined by Nicholson:

The ornaments to be cast in this composition are modelled in clay, or common plastering, and afterwards carved in a block of box-wood. The carving must be done with great neatness and truth, as on it depends the exquisiteness of the ornament. The composition is cut with a knife into pieces, and then closely pressed by hand into every part of the mould; it is then placed in a press, worked by an iron screw, by which the composition is forced into every part of the sculpture. After being taken out of the press, by giving it a tap upside down, it comes easily out of the mould. One foot in length is as much as is usually cast at a time; and when this is first taken out of the mould, all superfluous composition is removed by cutting it off with a knife; the waste pieces being thrown into the copper to assist in making a fresh supply of composition.³⁶

A shop inventory taken at the dissolution of one of Wellford's Philadelphia competitors, Freeman & Company, corroborates Nicholson's instructions and gives a glimpse of a composition shop in Wellford's day.³⁷ The shop contained an "engine for pressing," a cask of whiting in an open stove, three oil jugs, an iron pot, two kettles, a paint pot, two brushes, twenty small pattern boards, a composition knife, a bench dresser, a "ladder machine for making beach tackle," "2 black for painting," and one table. Freeman's store held an additional sixty-eight moulds, of which four were brass.

Broken pieces of Wellford's ornament reveal tricks that aided its manufacture and application. He often placed string through ornament to act as tensile reinforcement for thin members such as vines and to link small elements that otherwise would be tedious to mount. An example of the latter is a string of beads applied as an enrichment to a molding (fig. 5). He also mounted entire motifs on paper in order to protect extremely delicate linear elements. The paper was then glued onto the woodwork and, once painted, became invisible. A good example of this is a small lyre (fig. 6) whose individual strings, measuring less than $\frac{1}{16}$ inch in thickness, would be impossible to ship or even handle without breaking.

Wellford himself published directions on fastening composition ornament to woodwork, which were titled:

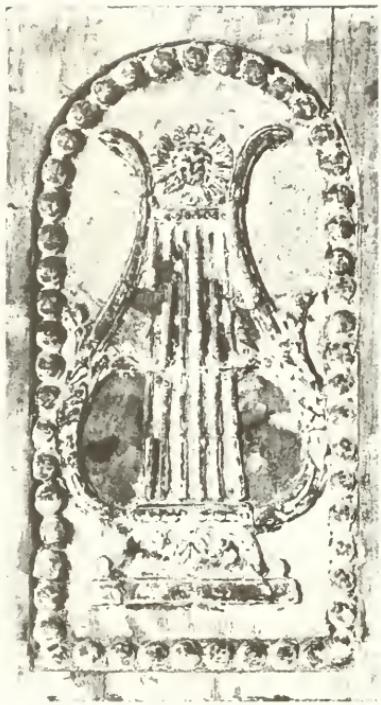


s. Detail of composition ornament beads from a mantel, illustrating how Wellford formed beads on a string (upper right) to make installation easier. *Private collection.* Photograph by the author.

It is absolutely necessary, that every carpenter should
paste up in his tool chest
DIRECTIONS
for securely fixing
ROBERT WELLFORD'S
Composition Ornaments and Mouldings.³⁸

He distributed these directions with every sale, and they explained very clearly the final phase of his craft.

First, the directions explained how composition could be softened so that it could be straightened and made to lie flat on woodwork. Wellford gave several methods for softening, all involving slight moisture and, sometimes, slight heat, such as damp rags and a warm brick, or longer exposure to damp rags. Next, Wellford gave advice



6. Detail of composition ornament lyre, which was mounted on paper to protect the ornament from breakage during shipping and installation. *Private collection.*
Photograph by the author.

for attaching the ornament to woodwork. Most pieces could be glued on after their backs were slightly warmed. Heavier ornament was also attached with sprigs or brads. He also mentioned that pencils, compasses, and squares were also necessary for proper aligning of ornaments on woodwork.

If an ornament was broken or several pieces were joined together, a small amount of composition could fill in the joint to make it invisible, especially when painted. Finally, Wellford gave instructions about painting, among other things stressing that ornament should be painted as soon as possible to protect it from moisture.

WELLFORD AND THE GEORGE READ HOUSE

We can follow Wellford's method of working in a particularly well-documented example, the George Read II House, in New Castle, Delaware, a small city and county seat about 30 miles downriver from Philadelphia. Read was a wealthy (and apparently thoroughly unlikable) attorney who began building a new house about 1801 on the Strand in New Castle, adjacent to his father's house. Read purchased most of his building materials from Philadelphia and employed a carpenter, Peter Crouding, from that city.

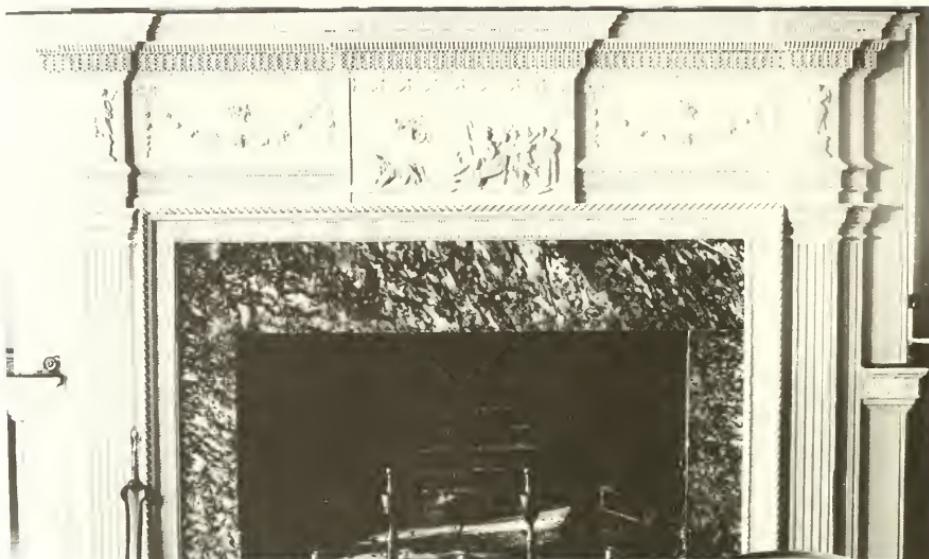
By the summer of 1803, Read's house was being finished inside. Sometime before August 6, 1803, Read wrote to John Read, Jr., his brother and agent in Philadelphia, about several interior articles, including composition ornaments. He was evidently not specific enough, because John Read wrote back,

Welford [*sic*] informs me he must have the exact size of the Tablets—side friezes—& truss, that he may prepare the ornaments to fit. I got him to make a drawing that you might fully understand what he means—each tablet is distinguished with the respective ornaments. If the ornaments do not please you—let me know that others may be got. As soon as you finish the sizes, he will send down. By no means paint your mantles if you do there will be much danger in putting on the ornaments after, they will not stick well on paint.³⁹

George Read wrote back, enclosing the dimensions of the “Tablets side frizes & Trusses” and noted that his center tablets extended down into the architrave (fig. 7), something that he thought unusual—perhaps an indication of a subtle shift in Federal period design.⁴⁰

Wellford filled the order on August 23, sending a man to New Castle to deliver the ornaments and attach them to the mantels. (A transcript of the entire bill is given in Appendix I.) At this point, trouble started. The quarrelsome Read noted, “Welford’s ornaments are by no means of that size which my Mantles require,”⁴¹ a complaint that seems somewhat understandable in looking at the surviving ornaments. In several of the center tablets, the ornament fairly swims in a sea of blank space; as it was, Wellford tried to fill some of the vacant area with small swags and other ornaments (fig. 7a). Such compositional tricks were not usual in Wellford’s work; they were forced on him here by the great size of Read’s mantels. Indeed, the scale of everything in Read’s house was generally above the norm. Because Wellford made repetitively produced ornament adapted to the normal range of house mantel proportions, he had trouble adapting to Read’s specifications.

Read accepted Wellford’s ornament, but his unhappiness did not stop. As he did with many other craftsmen, Read complained about Wellford’s charges. He ignored Wellford’s August bill and several subsequent letters asking for payment, finally responding in January 1804 as follows:



7. Mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford. Southeast parlor of the Read House, New Castle, Delaware, 1803. The mantel was constructed by house carpenter Peter Crouding. *Reproduced courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware. Photograph by the author.*

I would remark as to your account—that you charge me with one more tablet than I rec'd or had occasion for—there being but six fireplaces with ornamented tablets, & your account charges seven tablets. Further you charge me nine dollars for putting them up or fixing them as you call it & the man was but one day & a half engaged in the work—besides I paid his expenses while at New Castle & you charge \$5 for his passage up & down & the whole time he was absent from your shop was 36 hours. Of all the Bills I have had rendered to me in the course of my building, none have made so strong an impression on my mind of its extravagance as that I have been animadverting upon. I do not profess to be acquainted with your charges, nor do I pretend to say they are unusual. But they



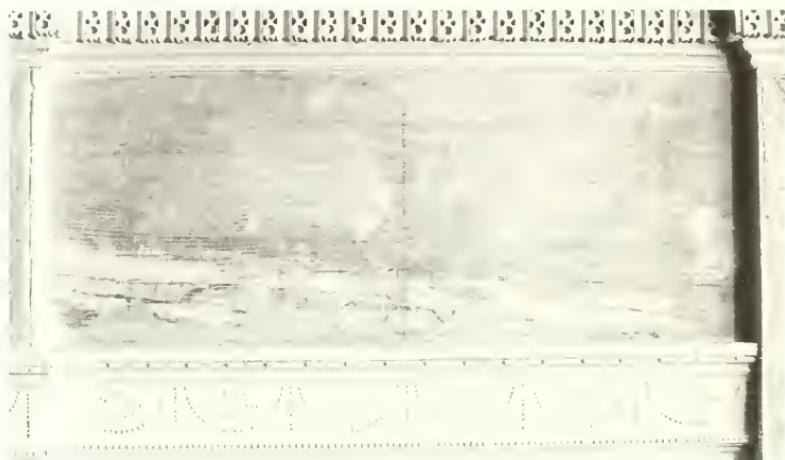
7a. Center tablet of the mantel in figure 7, showing the Triumph of Mars, 1803. HOA 21 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", WOA 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". *Photograph by the author.*

appear to me so questionable, that I have resolved to ascertain by enquiry in Philad'a whether your charges are usual before I settle the account.⁴²

In the end, Wellford deducted \$4.87 from the original total of \$54.87, and the two men agreed on \$50.00. The Read House project may have been unusual for Wellford, in that he sent an assistant to attach his ornaments. His printed directions for attaching ornament suggests that more often carpenters would perform this task.

The Read House mantels also illustrate at least one part of Wellford's instructions for fastening his ornament: the recommendation to use proper tools for layout (pencil, compasses, set-square). When restorers stripped the paint from several of the mantels whose orna-

8. Center panel of a mantel showing the vertical pencil construction lines recommended by Wellford to install composition ornament correctly. The Read House, New Castle, Delaware, 1803. *Photograph by the author.*



ment had been lost, pencil marks, clearly drawn with a square and located with rule and compass, appeared on the wood marking the center lines and other significant points of alignment for the composition ornaments (fig. 8.)

WELLFORD'S ORNAMENT STYLE

At least 95 percent of surviving Wellford ornament appears on mantelpieces, the overall design of which followed a fairly rigid formula. The typical Federal-period mantel was constructed like an aedicule, or small, flat-roofed temple. The fireplace opening was framed by a complete classical order—columns or pilasters to each side and a full entablature above, with the cornice forming the mantel shelf. In the Federal mantel, the proportions of the entablature were often distorted from the true rules of the orders, with the architrave reduced and the frieze enlarged to create a field for applied decoration. Sometimes the center panel also broke through the archi-

trave, creating a taller field for ornament and giving visual dominance to the center.

This formula determined the nature of Wellford's ornament. The center panel held the most important ornament, usually an allegorical scene but sometimes a tableau of vines, fruit, and other classical decoration. This panel was referred to as the tablet. Recessed to each side of the center were symmetrical side panels that almost universally held swags made of various flora and suspended from bows. Farther from the center, projecting blocks above the side supports, called trusses, were filled with a variety of figures or classical decorative motives. Composition ornament might also be applied to pilaster or column capitals and as enrichment for moldings.

Stylistically, Wellford's work belongs to the mainstream of late eighteenth century Anglo-American neoclassicism. Although he was a superb carver, he borrowed many of his subjects and compositions from other sources. Indeed, many of his molds were quite close copies of scenes and motifs first carved by his master, John Jacques, or others. Nor were Wellford's immediate models themselves any more original. In most cases English composition ornament makers borrowed their figures and artistic compositions from contemporary artists. Artistic composition apparently was not part of the training of a composition ornament maker, whose skills aimed rather at the reproduction and dissemination of the creations of others, much as an engraver reproduced a painting for publication. But if Wellford's work cannot claim great artistic creativity, it is distinguished by the breadth of motifs that he produced. He is important as a major vehicle for the trans-Atlantic transfer of neoclassicism to America and its adaptation to American themes.

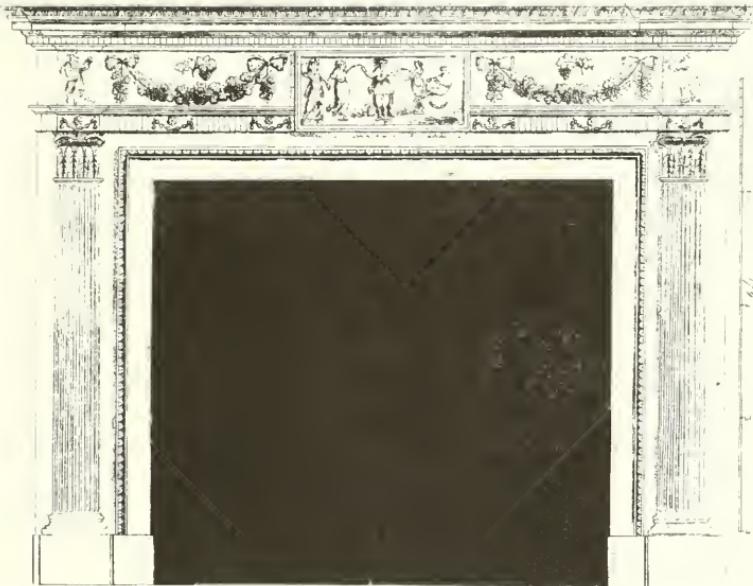
Wellford borrowed most immediately from the circle of English composition makers around his master, John Jacques. Many of his ornamental motifs can be found in a catalogue believed to be from Jacques's shop (figs. 9 and 10) now partially surviving at Winterthur.⁴³ Wellford's ornament also derived from the publications of George Richardson, a draftsman and designer in Robert Adam's



9. Designs for composition ornament (Plate 1), from a catalog believed to be from the shop of John Jacques, London, c. 1794. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

shop who published several books of architectural ornament⁴⁴ (fig. 11). The ultimate sources for many Wellford designs are found in Wedgwood pottery ornamentation and in drawings by artists working in England such as John Flaxman, Michelangelo Pergolesi, and Angelica Kaufmann.

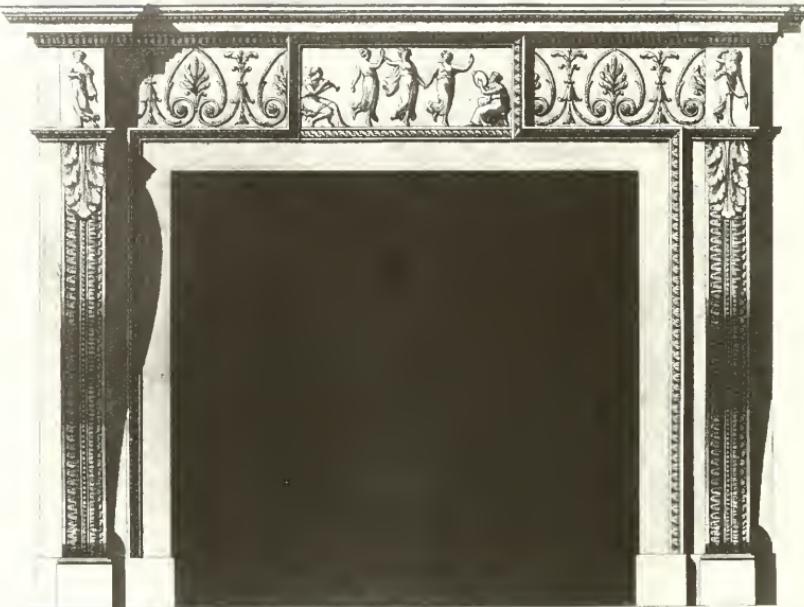
The discussion that follows by no means constitutes a complete



10. Composition ornament suggested for use on a mantel (Plate 20), from a catalog believed to be from the shop of John Jacques, London, c. 1794.
Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

catalog of Wellford's oeuvre, but rather is intended to illustrate the wide scope of his motifs and especially his most popular ornaments. Wellford's "tablet" or center panel scenes can be divided into several groups: (1) pastoral, mythological and allegorical themes derived from British sources; (2) patriotic themes honoring the new American republic and its heroes; and (3) nonfigural or non-narrative, purely ornamental subjects.

Pastoral subjects, in the eighteenth century called "rural scenes,"



11. Composition ornament suggested for use on a mantel (Plate XI), from George Richardson, *A New Collection of Chimney Pieces Ornamented in the style of the Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Architecture* (London, 1781). Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection.

include scenes with a shepherd boy leaning against a tree while a dog and sheep look on (fig. 12),⁴⁵ and with a group of country dancers and a tree (fig. 13). Both motifs evoked rural pleasures such as hunting and the idealized simple, carefree life of country boys and maids.

The country dance and tree motif was one of Wellford's most popular scenes. It appeared in the documented George Read II House (1804), and signed examples exist *in situ* in central Pennsylvania and Charleston. Variations on the scene among known Wellford



12. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Shepherd Boy scene. Signed "R Wellford Phila" on strap next to sheep. Joseph Glover House, Charleston, South Carolina, c. 1825. HOA 7", WOA 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". *Photograph by the author.*



13. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Tree and Country Dance scene, 1800–1820. Signed "R Wellford Philade" on face of monument. HOA 9", WOA 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. *Photograph by the author.*

examples demonstrate composition ornament's flexibility to adapt to panels of different proportions and sizes. The number of figures can vary, as can the presence, absence, or type of tree. The scene had a long lineage in ornament and art, a lineage which is typical for Wellford's motifs. It appears on English mantels⁴⁶ and in the catalogue from the Jacques circle (fig. 10)⁴⁷ and is also found in other composition ornament examples in America, though with scale and some details differing slightly from Wellford's.⁴⁸ George Richardson's mantel decoration illustrated in figure 11 displays a very similar composition. Comparable dancing scenes, drawn by John Flaxman, are found on Wedgwood pottery, where they are sometimes known as the Dancing Hours.⁴⁹

Mythological scenes in Wellford's work vary in content and symbolism, but all partake of a certain seriousness and all are chaste and moderate. A typical example is the very beautiful and finely detailed reclining Diana, a goddess especially known for her chastity, of which a documented example survives at the Read House (fig. 1). This scene appears on English mantelpieces, although with differences in detail that suggest a common source rather than any direct connection.⁵⁰

Scenes with Cupid appear frequently in Wellford's work; their underlying themes stress control of the passions. In one popular example, Cupid is bound to a tree and disarmed by a kneeling female figure, while two other women dance (fig. 14). Examples signed by Wellford survive in Virginia and Charleston. The original source for this subject was the painting by Angelica Kauffman, "Cupid Bound by the Graces," which was widely disseminated as an aquatint.⁵¹ The disarming of Cupid represented moderation and the control of amorous passion.

Another classical motif with a clearly allegorical message is the figure of a woman, seated in a chariot and holding a cornucopia, who presumably represents Plenty (fig. 15). Surrounding her are sprays of foliage, a favorite Wellford enframement, and spiraling vine tendrils that fill rectangular panels of varying dimensions. At the base of the



14. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Cupid bound by Venus, 1807–1825. Signed “R Wellford Philade” on strap at the base of the tree. HOA 9”, WOA 22”. Originally from a house on Broad Street, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.*

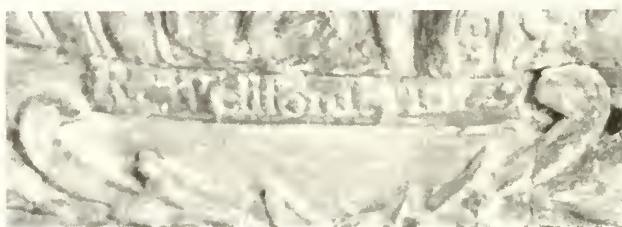
chariot is a signature plate with the inscription “R. Wellford Phila.” (fig. 15a) Signed examples survive in their original locations in Charleston and Virginia.

National or patriotic themes make up another class of Wellford tablets. To judge by the number of surviving examples, these were some of Wellford’s most popular models, a testimony to Americans’ hunger for an art and allegory of their own and their desire to conspicuously display their allegiance and loyalty to the new republic, especially in times of trouble.

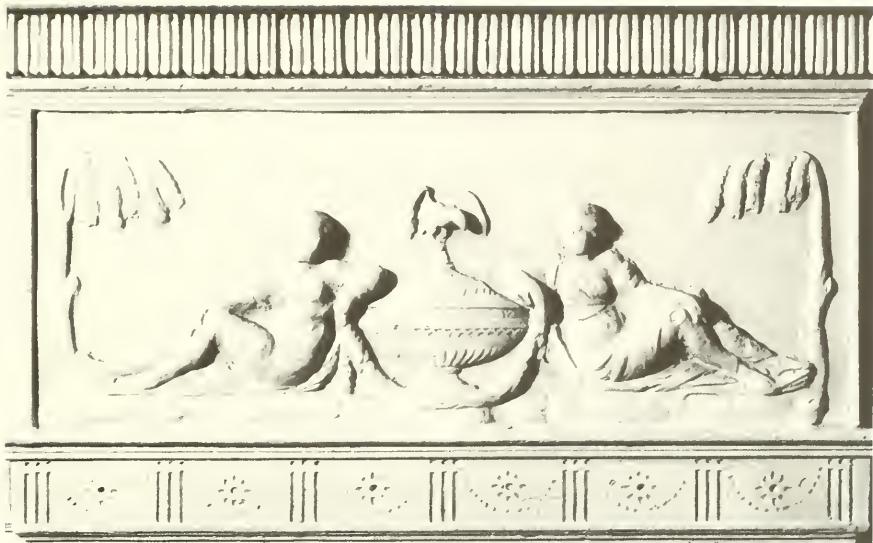
Perhaps the earliest of these scenes was the memorial to George Washington, two signed examples of which survive, although not in their original locations (fig. 16). Two reclining figures lean on an urn



15. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford (during restoration), Woman with Chariot ("Plenty"), 1816–20. HOA 9½", WOA 19". George Hoffman House, Charleston, South Carolina.
Photograph by the author.

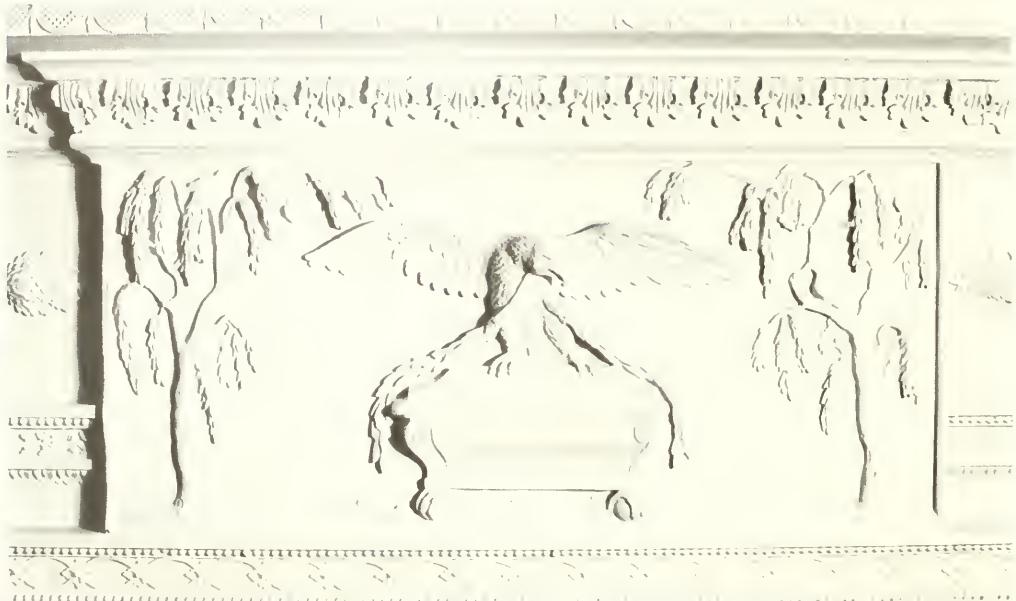


15a. Detail of signature plate from a mantel in the George Hoffman House, with the inscription "R. Wellford PHILA."



16. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Memorial to George Washington, c. 1800. Signed "R Wellford" on base of urn. HOA 7½", WOA 19¾". *Private collection, Philadelphia.*
Photograph by the author.

that is topped with an eagle and inscribed "Dec. 14th 1799 Ae 85 YEARS" with the initials "GW" below. Drooping trees stand to each side. The scene is derived from American and English mourning pictures, which typically had the same elements. The urn had an approved classical lineage as well as an association with death. The weeping willow trees were often planted in graveyards to soak up ground water, keeping the ground dry for grave diggers and reducing water runoff from burials; they came to be associated with mourning. Finally, drooping, sorrowful figures were ubiquitous in such scenes.³²



17. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, "Sacred to the Memory of Departed Heroes," c. 1814. Signed "R. Wellford Philadelphia Penn." HOA 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", WOA 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Philadelphia Museum of Art, acc. no. 20-76-1. Photograph by the author.

Another mourning tablet, probably dating from the War of 1812, depicts a mature, fierce eagle crouching on a sarcophagus that stands on ball-and-claw feet and is inscribed "Sacred to the Memory of Departed Heroes" (fig. 17). It is flanked by weeping willows in which smaller birds are perched. Although Wellford again invokes elements of the mourning picture here, the fierceness of the eagle and the feet of the sarcophagus also convey a spirit of resolution and determination to avenge the fallen.⁵³

A patriotic scene that appeared early in Wellford's American career was the allegory that he called the Goddess of Liberty (fig. 18). It



18. Central tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Goddess of Liberty (during restoration), c. 1804. Signed "R. Wellford Philadelphia." *Location unknown. Photograph by the author.*

depicts a young eagle (the new Republic) drinking from a cup held by a female figure representing Peace, holding an olive branch. The Goddess of Liberty, with a flag in one hand and the revolutionary emblems of pike and cap in the other, looks on. Wellford borrowed molds for the two female figures themselves from the Country Dance scene. This scene is signed, but its current location unfortunately is unknown.

Wellford celebrated a triumph of the War of 1812 in a scene depicting Admiral Oliver H. Perry's victory at the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813 (fig. 19). Wellford created embracing sprays of foliage and vines, closed them at the top with an inverted flower swag, and inserted in the frame a naval battle. Above the frame floats a ribbon inscribed with Perry's words, "We have met the enemy and



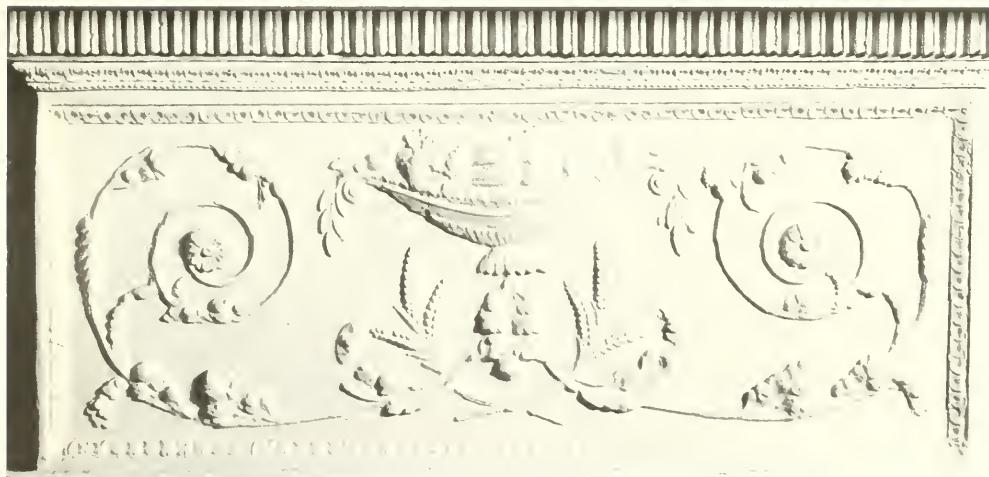
19. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Battle of Lake Erie (during restoration), c. 1814. HOA 11", WOA 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ ". Location unknown. Photograph by the author.

they are ours." At least thirteen examples of this Wellford panel survive, including the iron stove shown in figure 2. Similar scenes of this battle were widely depicted in prints and on china.

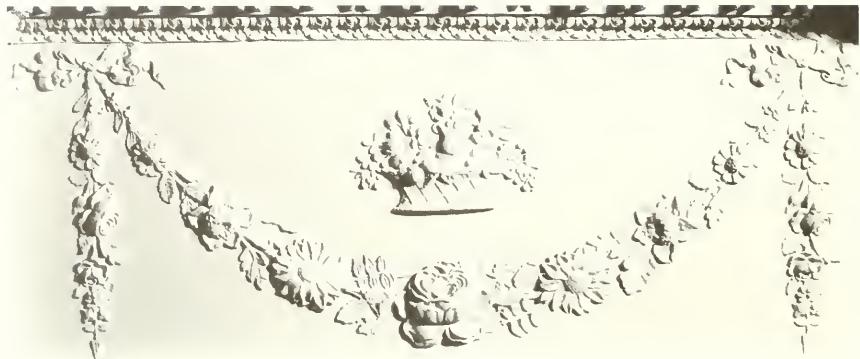
Center tablets that are primarily decorative and nonfigural are ubiquitous in ornament of this period. Wellford used a variety of classical vase forms and swags accompanied by a controlled profusion of vines, tendrils, and similar elements. Such motifs appear in the Jacques catalogue and indeed are one of the most characteristic features of the Adam style. While a few of Wellford's nonfigurative panels are signed, most, like figure 20, can only be attributed to him

on the basis of stylistic similarity and context. For example, several such panels occur in a row of speculatively built houses (circa 1810) on Delancey Street in Philadelphia, houses which contain other examples of composition ornament identical to signed or documented Wellford pieces. Since the same builder constructed all the houses, and since Wellford was the only supplier of composition ornament in Philadelphia at that date, we can conclude that all of it is by him.

Wellford referred to side panels as "friezes" and the swags that ornamented them as "festoons." One difference between American and English mantels of the period is that quite often English mantels have an unbroken frieze with a uniform ornamental treatment across the whole mantel. Such a treatment rarely occurs in America, where



20. Center tablet of a mantel with composition ornament, attributed to Robert Wellford, 1807–1825. Heyward House, Charleston, South Carolina.
Photograph by the author.



21a. Side panel of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, 1800–1820.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, acc. no. 59-147-1.

Photograph by the author.

the center and sides of the frieze are almost always treated differently. Festoons or swags are thus almost universal in Wellford's work.

Wellford's festoons came in different scales and depicted several varieties of flora. Roses and daisies were the most commonly depicted flowers (fig. 21a). Fruit baskets often accompanied the floral swags. Other swag types included hop and grape vines, oak leaves and acorns, laurel branches with berries, sheaves of wheat, and linked petals.

Wellford's truss ornaments fall into groups similar to the center panel themes: allegorical figures, heroes, and decorative vase forms. One of the most popular Wellford truss sets depicts on the left, a young woman walking a lion and a lamb (fig. 21b), and on the right, Cupid yielding his arrows to Venus, who also holds a dove (fig. 21c). Wellford took these figures from a plate of George Richardson's 1778–79 edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconology* (fig. 22). A woman walking a lion and lamb symbolizes Moderation, "the state of keeping a due mean between extremes."⁵⁴ The right scene represented the passion of Love.⁵⁵ The pair reiterates the neoclassical theme of controlling passionate love.



21b. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, *Moderation*, 1800–1820. HOA 7", WOA 4". Philadelphia Museum of Art, acc. no. 59-147-1. Photograph by the author.



21c. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Love, c. 1815. HOA 7", WOA 4". *Philadelphia Museum of Art*, acc. no. 59-147-1. *Photograph by the author.*



22. Cesare Ripa, *Iconology*, edited by George Richardson (London, 1778–79),
Plate LXXXIX. Courtesy, the Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical
Collection.



23a. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Physics (during restoration), c. 1815. HOA 8", WOA 4½". Robert Haig House, Charleston, South Carolina. Photograph by the author.



23b. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Metaphysics (during restoration), c. 1815. HOA 8", WOA 4½". Robert Haig House, Charleston, South Carolina. Photograph by the author.

Another set of truss ornaments represents Physics and Metaphysics. A woman bent over a globe holding a clepsydra, an antique water dial, represents Physics (fig. 23a). She is paired with another emblematic figure from Richardson's edition of Ripa's *Iconology*. Metaphysics,⁵⁰ represented by the figure of a woman leaning on a classical pedestal in contemplation, with one foot on an orb (fig. 23b). Metaphysics also appears in Wellford's work balanced by Re-

flection⁵⁷ (another figure taken from the *Iconology*), which is represented by a woman studying herself in a mirror that reflects a ray of light from her heart to her eye. (This ray can still be made out in the heavily painted ornament.)

A fairly common pair of Wellford truss figures, Music and Contemplation (figs. 24a and 24b), evokes similar themes. On the left-hand truss of a mantel in the Read House, Music is represented by a woman playing a lyre with a small figure standing on a tall pedestal behind her. On the right, Contemplation is represented by a woman leaning on a pedestal deep in thought, her chin on her hand. Other



24a. (far left) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Music, 1803. HOA 8½", WOA 4¼". Southwest parlor, the Read House, New Castle, DE. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware. Photograph by the author.

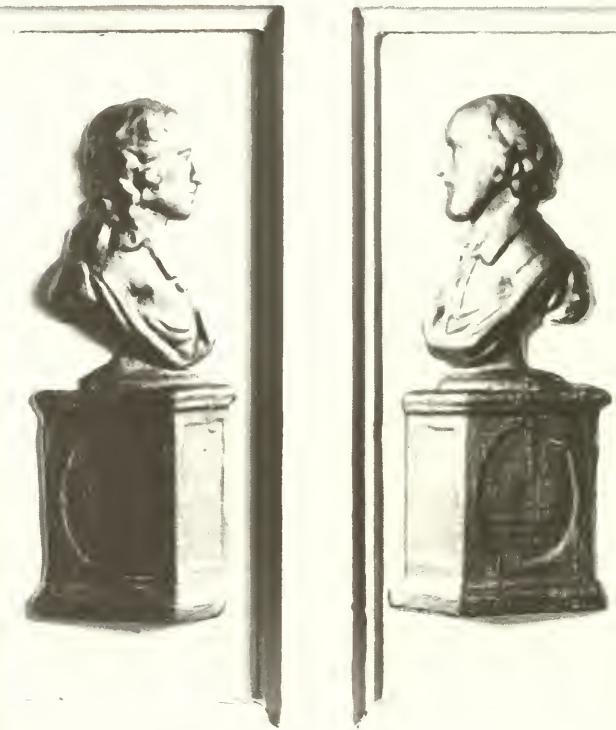
24b. (left) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Contemplation, 1803. HOA 8½", WOA 4¼". Southwest parlor, the Read House, New Castle, DE. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Delaware. Photograph by the author.

American and British versions of these figures are known.⁵⁸ They probably derive from Wedgwood motifs drawn by Flaxman and inspired by Roman reliefs.⁵⁹

Wellford also offered truss ornaments representing at least two sets of historical figures. For the literary, he provided the busts of Milton and Shakespeare (figs. 25a and 25b). For those who wanted to display their patriotism and be inspired by worthy Americans,

25a. (*far left*) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, bust of John Milton, c. 1800. HOA 7½", WOA 3". Grubb Mansion, Mount Hope, Pennsylvania. *Photograph by the author.*

25b. (*left*) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, bust of William Shakespeare, c. 1800. HOA 7½", WOA 3". Grubb Mansion, Mount Hope, Pennsylvania. *Photograph by the author.*



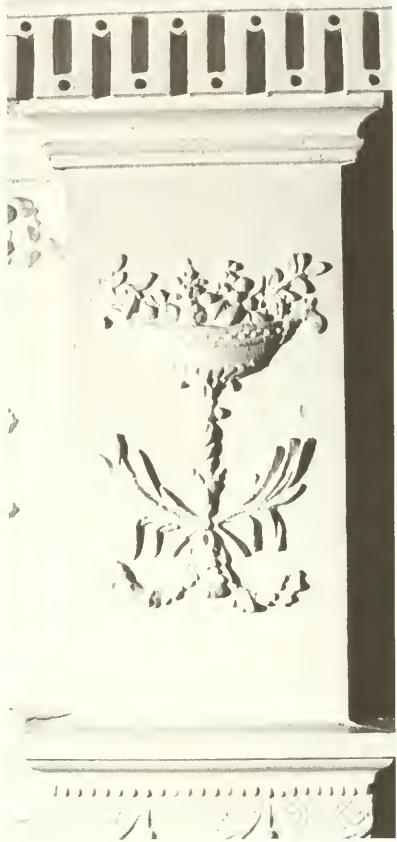


26a. (*far left*) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, bust of Benjamin Franklin, 1800–1820. HOA 9", WOA 5 1/4". *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, acc. no. 66.225. *Photograph by the author.*

26b. (*left*) Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, bust of George Washington, 1800–1820. HOA 9", WOA 5 1/4". *Metropolitan Museum of Art*, acc. no. 66.225. *Photograph by the author.*

George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were available (figs. 26a and 26b). Wellford copied the Joseph Wright portrait of Washington and St. Aubin's engraving of Franklin, who showed the great man in the simple fur hat he preferred to the English wig. The hat came to symbolize American independence and the American wilderness.

Of the nonfigural truss ornaments, two appear most often. One is a striking composition made of a basin filled with foliage and fruit that rests on a spindle rising from crossed sprays (fig. 27). The other is a draped amphora, an upright, egg-shaped vessel with two handles, that occurs in several variations (for one example from the John Steele House, see figure 28b).



27. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, floral decoration, 1806. HOA 9", WOA 4 1/2". Jacob Miller House, near Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
Photograph by the author.

Wellford also provided a complete line of classical enrichments that could appear almost anywhere on a mantel, but were particularly common on the moldings of the cornice and the architrave around the fireplace opening. Examples include classical egg and dart, acanthus leaf, tongue and groove, and bead motifs. Several sizes of a beautiful swag-and-net enrichment were often applied to the front face of the mantel shelf. Acanthus leaves were popular, allowing buyers to obtain a Corinthian order without the expense of carving elaborate capitals.

WELLFORD ORNAMENT IN THE SOUTHEAST

Surviving Wellford ornament in the Southeast illustrates important aspects of his style and craft and of the impact of trade mechanisms on the finished product.

The John Steele House in Salisbury, North Carolina, provides rare and valuable examples of ornament produced before Wellford went out on his own. It also shows us another way that he handled a commission at a great distance. John Steele was a planter of Rowan County, North Carolina, and the head of the United States Treasury, then in Philadelphia, in 1799. When Steele built a new house on his plantation, he adopted many aspects of Philadelphia house fashion, including the use of composition ornament bought from the firm of Zane, Chapman & Wellford.⁴⁰ The sale was handled through their Baltimore agent, Caldbleugh; the bill, re-



28. Mantel with composition ornament by the firm of Zane, Chapman & Wellford. John Steele House, Salisbury, North Carolina, 1800. HOA 65 $\frac{3}{8}$ ", WOA 74 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". MRF 27.286.

produced in Appendix II, makes no mention of Steele's house itself. Steele bought ornaments for two mantels, one in the front parlor on the first floor of his house (fig. 28), and one in the rear parlor (fig. 29). (The mantel in the rear parlor has been moved to another house.)

An interesting aspect of the bill of sale is that it specifies "fixing" for the major ornaments (center tablets, side friezes, and trusses), in

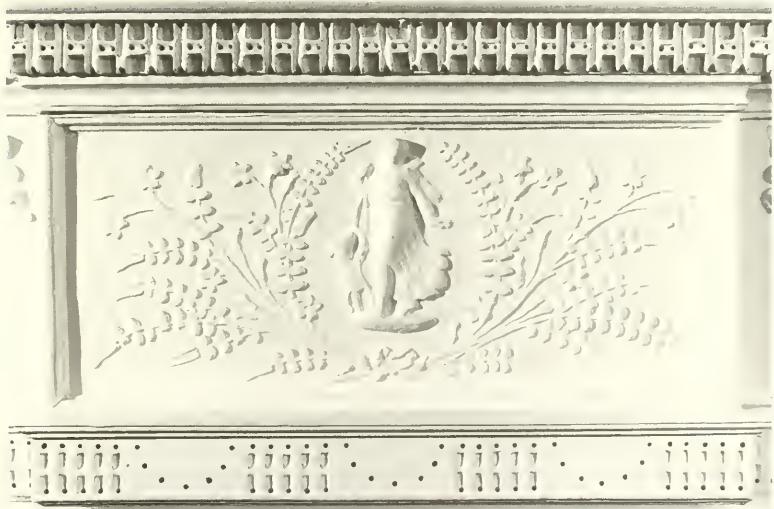
29. Mantel with composition ornament by the firm of Zane, Chapman & Wellford. Originally in the John Steele House, Salisbury, North Carolina, 1800. HOA 59½", WOA 78¾". MRF 27,287.



one case "fix'd on boards," presumably to prevent breakage and to ensure that they were installed properly. The boards could then have been affixed to the mantels at the site. Such a procedure, which is otherwise undocumented in Wellford's work but may have been common, implies a close working relationship between Wellford and the carpenter making the mantel. Such a relationship may be readily accepted in this instance, since Steele employed a Philadelphia joiner, John Langdon, to make much of his finish carpentry. However, other ornament seems to have been installed on the mantels at the house site, because Steele specifically paid Wellford for a packing box for the whole shipment.

The Steele House ornament itself is illuminating because it seems to reflect an early and somewhat timid phase of Wellford's style, before he went out on his own and produced the bold and finely detailed designs that characterize his signed and documented mature work. In addition, at this stage in his career he was almost certainly working in part with a set of molds left in the Zane & Chapman shop by a previous composition ornament maker. He may even have worked with some leftover imported ornament. What is extremely unusual is that the earliest documented Wellford ornament outside of Pennsylvania comes from the North Carolina backcountry, far from any urban center.

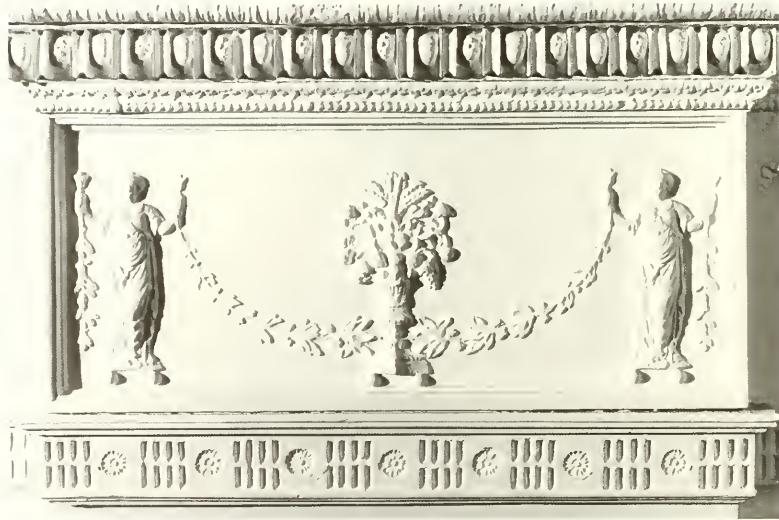
One center tablet from the Steele House, Diana amidst sprays of "jessamine," or jasmine (fig. 29a), is unique in Wellford's work. Stylistically, its flatness, the small size of the center figure, and the lack



29a. Central tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by the firm of Zane, Chapman & Wellford, Jessamine and Diana. Originally in the John Steele House, Salisbury, North Carolina.
HOA 8½", WOA 20".
MRF 27,28".

of detail in both the figure and the plant forms differ markedly from known Wellford designs. It is possible that this tablet represents a mold that Zane & Chapman had before Wellford came, and that Wellford subsequently stopped selling this particular design. His own tablet figure of Diana and her hound (documented at the Read House, figure 1, and known in four other examples) is very different stylistically. The center tablet ornament from the mantel in the front parlor of the Steele House, composed of two women with outstretched arms connected to a center vase by swags (fig. 28a) is also unique in Wellford's work. The female figures often appear in his later work but usually as the dominant center of spiraling vines, a more effective and classical composition.

Likewise, although the side friezes and truss ornaments are certainly similar to later known Wellford work, there are no known ex-



28a. Central tablet of a mantel with composition ornament by the firm of Zane, Chapman & Wellford, two female figures holding floral swags.
John Steele House, Salisbury, North Carolina.
HOA 8 1/10", WOA 19 1/8".
MRF 27,28".

amples that are identical. Like their corresponding center tablets, they lack some of the rich detail and boldness that Wellford's flower festoons, oak-leaf and acorn swags, and draped amphoras (called "vases" in the Steele House bill) usually display. The mantel in the Steele House's front parlor does have the pineapples, acorns, rosettes, and ovolو molding enriched with a tongue (egg and dart) motif (fig. 28b), all of which are mentioned in the bill. These ornaments are skillfully worked into the fine punch-and-gouge carving. The mantel originally in the rear parlor (fig. 29) has no such enrichments, possibly indicating the room's somewhat lower status.

In the Delaware Valley and along the trade routes to the west, Wellford had virtually no competition. Signed and documented examples, close comparison with them, and consequently perceived patterns of ornamental usage allow work to be attributed or not attributed to Wellford's shop with a fair degree of certainty. The Read House mantels offer good examples of such patterns typical in the mid-Atlantic region; so do the speculatively built houses on Delancey Street in Philadelphia; so do the cluster of houses (or their surviving mantels) in Harrisburg and Lancaster that can be associated with the architect and builder Stephen Hills.

An example from the Southeast that suggests the same conclusion is the Wharton House in Accomack County, on Virginia's



28b. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by the firm of Zane, Chapman, and Wellford. John Steele House, Salisbury. North Carolina. HOA 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", WOA 4". MRF 27,287. The pineapple and acorn, beading, and tongue decoration, all composition ornament specified in Zane and Chapman's bill to Steele, are effectively combined with the punch-and-gouge work of this mantel.

Eastern Shore. The house was built in the first decade of the 1800s by John Wharton (1762–1811), a maritime merchant who spent much time in Philadelphia (and, in fact, died there). The house is more like a suburban Philadelphia villa than a Tidewater plantation house, and it is believed that Wharton contracted for much of the work in Philadelphia.⁶¹ He probably obtained Wellford ornament in this way. The Wharton House contains three mantels with signed Wellford center tablets (one is shown in figure 30) and another (a tree and country dance scene) identical to known Wellford exam-



30. Mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Woman with Chariot ("Plenty"), c. 1800. Wharton House, Accomac, Virginia.

Photograph by the author.

ples. Further, the side frieze and truss ornaments are identical in form and size to others in Wellford's known or attributed work. The house also has composition ornament on an over-door panel, a chair rail, and some door and window architraves.

Charleston contains more examples of Wellford's work than any city except Philadelphia. The use of Wellford's ornament in Charleston illustrates the impact of the vicissitudes of trade on the final products. Here Wellford had competition from English imports. In a few instances, mantels are fully ornamented with Wellford motifs that can be matched with other known examples. A fine example is a mantel that contains a signed example of the woman with cornucopia and chariot (fig. 15). On the truss blocks of this mantel are figures possibly representing Drama (holding a mask) and Music (with a lyre), which appear often in Wellford's work (figs. 31a and 31b). Most unusually, however, these figures, when stripped, had written on them in pencil the price of the ornaments. Although difficult to read (the numbers on the left truss have been partially erased), on figure 31b, the price appears to be / 87½, probably indicating \$.87½. If this was the cost per ornament, it was higher than comparable ornaments in Philadelphia, perhaps suggesting a mark-up by a Charleston merchant; if this price was for the pair, it is very close to Philadelphia prices.⁶²

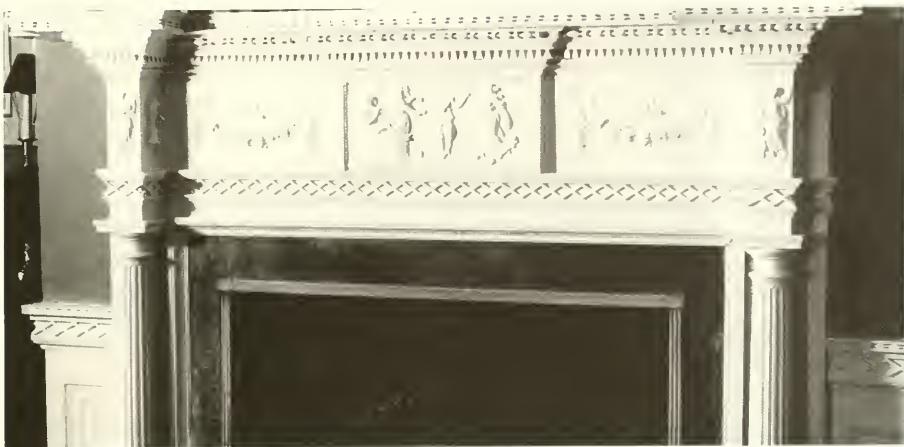
Consistent use of Wellford ornament on a mantel was not the norm, however. On some mantels in Charleston, indisputable Wellford ornament, such as a signed center panel, may be grouped with ornament that appears nowhere else in known Wellford work, suggesting a different source. For example, at the William Steele House (1815–19), a mantel with a signed Country Dance center tablet has hourglasses on the sides of the truss blocks that probably are not by Wellford (fig. 32). The George Chisolm House presents a fascinating array of composition-laden mantels, probably from several sources. One mantel has a center scene (possibly with a signature block) that is pieced together out of elements of Wellford's scene of Cupid tied to a tree (fig. 33). Several other mantels have unsigned center scenes



31a. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Drama (during restoration), 1816–20, HOA 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", WOA 4", George Hoffman House, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.*



31b. Truss block of a mantel with composition ornament by Robert Wellford, Music (during restoration), 1816–20, HOA 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", WOA 4", George Hoffman House, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.*



32. Mantel with composition ornament, 1815-19. HOA 62", woa 79". William G. Steele House, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.* The Country Dance scene in the center tablet can be attributed to Robert Wellford; however, other ornament, specifically the hourglass motifs on the sides of the truss blocks (fig. 32a), are probably the work of another composition ornament maker and may have been imported from London.

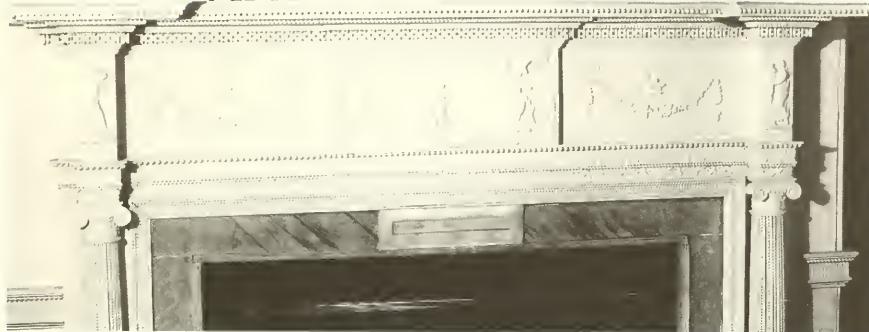
(such as the tree and country dance and the shepherd boy and sheep) that are identical in form and size to signed Wellford work and which are accompanied by side swags and truss ornaments that can be found in firmly attributed Wellford work. The same house also contains a mantel with a scene of a boar hunt and other ornament, none of which can be tied to any known Wellford work (fig. 34). The boar hunt scene seems related to another group of tablets common in the Charleston area, and also known in English examples, that does not have the customary fine detail that Wellford's confirmed work possesses.



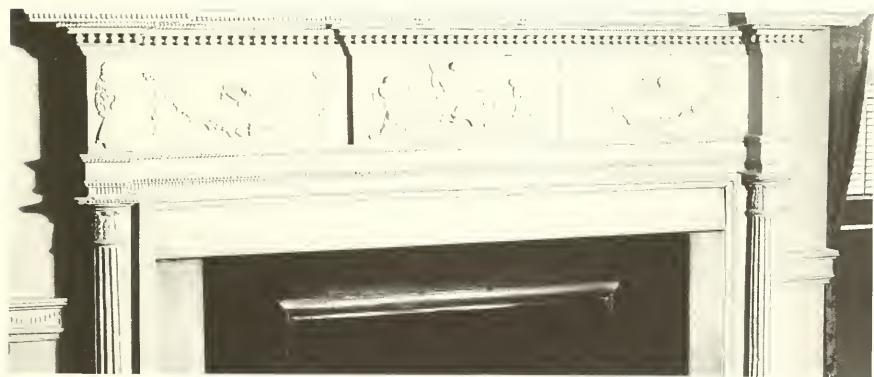
32a. Detail, truss block of a mantel showing composition ornament in the shape of an hourglass, probably not by Robert Wellford. *Photograph by the author.*

The selection of Wellford motifs that survive in Charleston (and indeed throughout the Southeast) reflects on the region's taste and possibly its politics. Particularly striking is the almost total lack of Wellford's political allegories or nationalistic themes. Rather, classical allegories, pastoral scenes, and non-representational Adamesque ornament were preferred. Perhaps overt displays of American nationalism may have smacked too much of Federalist politics, unpopular in this region devoted to states' rights. Similarly, there seems to have been little interest in scenes relating to the War of 1812, which were among Wellford's biggest sellers in the mid-Atlantic states. Only two Battle of Lake Erie mantels, both from north-central North Carolina, represent such themes in Wellford's work in the region. Aside from the very late Battle of New Orleans, this war had relatively little impact in the South as compared to the North, where most of the land battles occurred and from whence most of the U.S. Navy's ships and sailors came.

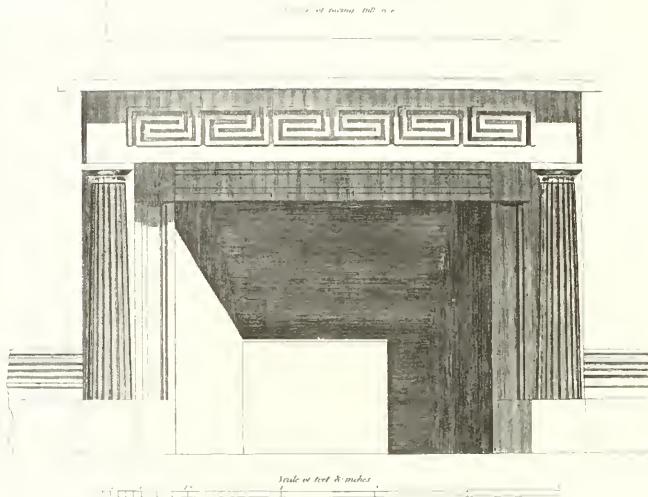
By 1820 composition ornament fell out of favor as an architectural material, pushed aside by styles that favored simplicity and less ornament. The radically simplified neoclassicism of Benjamin Henry Latrobe and his pupils was diametrically opposed to composition ornament's delicacy. Latrobe referred to such ornament, as well as the popular punch-and-gouge work, as "gew-gaws and gimcracks." The new style, which embodied a Greek taste then becoming popular in England, eschewed almost all ornament, and certainly any as finely detailed as Wellford's. His Adamesque ornament would have been sorely out of place in such a context.



33. Mantel with composition ornament, c. 1810. George Chisolm House, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.* While the center tablet scene appears to be pieced together from elements of Wellford's scene of Cupid tied to a tree, other elements cannot be definitively attributed to him.



34. Mantel with composition ornament, c. 1810. George Chisolm house, Charleston, South Carolina. *Photograph by the author.* Although it appears in a house with composition ornament that can be firmly attributed to Wellford, none of the ornament used on this mantel appears to be Wellford's work.



35. Plan for a "chimney piece," or mantel, from Asher Benjamin, *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter* (Plate LI), 1830. The bold yet simple decoration favored by the Greek Revival style could not be achieved with composition, which caused the material to fall from use in architectural settings.

While the more popular version of the Greek Revival did not eliminate ornament quite as thoroughly as Latrobe, it utilized ornament that was larger and bolder, on a scale that composition could not achieve (fig. 35). Modeled and cast plaster was the preferred medium here, with carved marble used occasionally. Composition did continue in use for furniture ornament, particularly mirror and picture frames, a market that Wellford himself may have tapped.

After 1821 Wellford nearly disappears from the documentary record.⁶³ He continued to live and work on South Tenth Street as a manufacturer of composition ornaments until 1836. The 1830 Census indicates that his wife had died by that date and that he had no assistants. Two women, probably daughters (then in their twenties), shared his house. In 1836 he retired (afterward calling himself a gentleman) and four years later he moved into the house of one of his daughters who had married a leading physician of Haddonfield, New Jersey. He died there in 1844 at the age of 69.⁶⁴

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END NOTES

1. This study has been helped by more people than I can possibly mention, namely all the owners of houses where Wellford's work survives. Research was initially funded by a Charles Peterson Fellowship through the Athenaeum of Philadelphia; the Peterson Fellowship Committee and the Athenaeum's Director, Roger Moss, have been most helpful and encouraging. Penelope Hartshorne Barchelor, retired National Park Service Architect, helped immensely by sharing her lifetime of knowledge of early Philadelphia-area architecture. At the Winterthur Museum and Library, Charles F. Hummel read a draft of this study and Eleanor McD. Thompson, E. McSherry Fowble, Gail Winkler, and the rest of the library staff have given much help and many insights. Similarly, Brad Rauschenberg and the staff of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts generously opened their research library and collection. Jack L. Lindsey at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and Morrison Hecksher at the Metropolitan Museum of Art allowed me to photograph pieces in their museums and benefitted me through discussions with them. Several antiques dealers—Francis Jay Carey, of Pennlyn, John J. Snyder, Jr. of Washington Borough, Frank Purcell of New Hope, Joseph Kindig of York, all in Pennsylvania—and Bernard Levy of New York City, graciously opened their collections and shared their knowledge. Thomas Savage, then of the Historic Charleston Foundation, shared

with me his great knowledge of that city and opened many doors for me there. Bernard Herman of the University of Delaware also aided me greatly in locating examples and making contacts throughout the East Coast. Finally, Martin Jay Rosenblum of Philadelphia generously allowed me to work far too many hours of company time on this project. Peter Copp of Martin Rosenblum & Associates continuously shared with me his extensive knowledge of Delaware Valley architecture and first suggested to me Robert Wellford as a research topic.

2. The Jackson firm's history is summarized in Geoffrey Beard, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain* (London: Phaidon, 1975), 225.

3. Noted in Beard, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain*, 91. Beard also notes James Thorpe providing composition ornaments for chimney pieces at Somerset House in 1788 (p. 248).

4. On Jacques see Geoffrey Beard and Christopher Gilbert, eds., *Dictionary of English Furniture Makers 1660-1840* (London: Furniture History Society, 1986), 477.

5. Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York: Scribner's, 1922), 258. Henry J. Kauffman, *The American Fireplace* (New York: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1972), 135–136. Bea Garvan, *Federal Philadelphia, 1785–1825: The Athens of the Western World* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1987), 46–47; plate 8.

6. An iron mold signed by Wellford is in the collection of Landis Valley Farm Museum near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. MESDA has several stoves with Wellford ornament, pieces discussed in H. E. Comstock, "The Redwell Ironworks," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts*, May 1981, 74.

7. Zane and Chapman's advertisement in the [Philadelphia] *Federal Gazette*, August 6, 1795, is transcribed in Alfred Coxe Prime, *The Arts and Crafts in Philadelphia, Maryland and South Carolina 1780–1800* (Walpole Society, 1932), 318.

William Zane was an ironmonger as early as 1791 and was always located at 23 South Second Street (Biddle's *Philadelphia Directory*). George R. Chapman was his clerk at least from 1793 (Hardie's *Philadelphia Directory*). After their split in 1797, Chapman was listed as an ironmonger, first on South Fourth Street (1798 Stafford's *Philadelphia Directory*), later at 48 Chestnut Street (1801 Stafford's *Philadelphia Directory*), and still later at 22 High [Market] Street (1804 Robinson's *Philadelphia Directory*). William Zane disappeared from the directories in 1801.

8. Advertisement for William Poyntell, [Philadelphia] *Gazette of the United States*, June 2, 1795 (quoted in text); In the *Federal Gazette* of Nov. 7, 1795, Zane, Chapman & Co., explain how Poyntell established the business and make a similar claim. In Prime, 317–18.

9. Naturalization papers, June 17, 1799, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Archives, Harrisburg.

10. An advertisement for Zane & Chapman, reproduced on page 5, vouches for the training of an ornament maker, recently come from London. *Federal Gazette*, January 1, 1798. Transcribed in Prime, 319.

11. "Philadelphia Sept. 20th, 1797. Rec'd of Lucius W. Stockton the sum of sixty dollars by the hands of Tench Coxe for Messrs. Zane & Chapman By me Robert Wellford." In the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).

12. *Federal Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 1, 1798. Transcribed in Prime, 319.

13. See John Summerson, "The Vision of John Gandy," in *Heavenly Mansions and Other Essays on Architecture* (London, 1949; reprint, New York: Norton, 1998), pp. 111–134, for difficulties in the building industry in England during this period.

14. Charles B. Wood III, "Powelton: An unrecorded building by William Strickland," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91 (1967), 149, fn. 27. No specific date is given

for the purchase of Wellford ornament, but the house was finished very early in 1802, a likely date for the composition ornament itself. The entry is in the accounts of Elizabeth Willing Powel in the Library Company of Philadelphia collection. Powelton was demolished many years ago.

15. 1804 *Philadelphia Directory*; 1805 Robinson's *Philadelphia Directory*; 1806 *Philadelphia Directory*. No more information has been found on Anderson.

16. Philadelphia Deed Book IC 7: page 720. Other documents related to Wellford's property are Philadelphia Deed Books IC 15: page 597; IC 19: page 749; MR 8: pages 588 and 590; IC 21: page 499; and unrecorded deed from Edward Burd to Robert and Martha Wellford, 27 July 1812, in Tench Coxe Papers, HSP. Another deed concerning the property appeared in 1813 when Wellford and his neighbor, Buddell Toy, a bricklayer, agreed to introduce water to their houses. Philadelphia Deed Book MR 13: page 41.

17. Several examples of composition-laden woodwork from Wellford's house on South Tenth Street are now at the Winterthur Museum in the McIntire Room and the Baltimore Drawing Room.

18. Copy c. 1801 in the Read Papers, HSP. Another copy, c. 1811, in the Stauffer Collection, HSP.

19. The earlier Zane and Chapman advertisement was Philadelphia, 6th mo. 27th 1796, document in Winterthur MSS., Advertisements.

20. "Derbyshire Spar, Alabaster, and Marble Mantle Ornaments repaired, as well as Bronzing of Statues, Busts, etc. N.B. To Country Customers. . . . By applying to the Philadelphia Directory, or to Carpenters, Carvers, or Gilders, in this City, the Manufactory may be readily found." Copy in HSP, no date but probably c. 1811, when Wellford was first listed at 145 South Tenth Street in Aitken's *Directory*.

21. Wellford advertisement, *Paxton's Philadelphia Annual Advertiser*, 1818.

22. He had been selling these since at least 1813; Robert Wellford to Judge Yeates, Nov. 30th 1813, in the Stauffer Collection, HSP.

23. *Federal Gazette & Baltimore Daily Advertiser*, 20 June 1799; MESDA Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans.

24. *The Oracle of Dauphin & Harrisburg Advertiser*, 6 September 1812. My thanks to John J. Snyder, Jr., for this reference.

25. John J. Snyder, Jr., kindly provided information on Hills and his work. On the Diller House mantels see *Architectural Record* 34/2 (August 1913), 225–31.

26. 15 April 1807; MESDA Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans.

27. In the 1818 *Paxton's Philadelphia Annual Advertiser* George Bridport, "decorative architect and furnisher," pitched his advertisement to "Gentlemen from the southward & westward."

28. Jo N. Hays, "Overlapping Hinterlands: York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore 1800–1850," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 116 (July 1992), 295–322.

29. *The Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, Richmond, Virginia, 10 June 1795 and *The North-Carolina Journal*, Halifax, North Carolina, 29 June 1795; in MESDA Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans.

30. *The Times*, Charleston, South Carolina, 11 September 1807; MESDA Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans.

31. Margaretta M. Lovell, "'Such Furniture as will be most Profitable': the Business of Cabinetmaking in Eighteenth-Century Newport," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 26 (1991), 44–48.

32. This discussion of the technique of making composition ornament has been aided greatly by two conservators, William Adair and Jonathan Thornton, co-authors of the Nation-

al Park Service's *Applied Decoration for Historic Interiors: Preserving Composition Ornament*, Preservation Briefs No. 34 (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1994), which provides an excellent discussion and illustrations of the techniques of composition manufacture.

33. Minard LaFever, *Modern Builder's Guide* (1st edition, 1833; reprint, New York: Dover, 1969), 132. For a modern rendition of this same basic recipe, see Thornton and Adair, p. 3. A somewhat simpler recipe appears in the *Journal of Isaac Byington*, a house framer from New England who traveled through the American South in the early nineteenth century:

Composition for Ornaments: Take chalk. Add thereto as much thin glue as will make a paste. Mix it well together, then pur it into a mould, a little oiled, which afterward, take our and it will dry as hard as stone.

In Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur, Doc. 531, p. 243.

34. Wendy A. Cooper, *In Praise of America* (New York: Knopf, 1980), 136.

35. [Maryland] *Federal Gazette and Daily Advertiser*, 20 June 1799, 3-4; from MESDA Index of Early Southern Artists and Artisans.

36. LaFever, 132-33.

37. T. B. Freeman & Co. Papers, in John Nicholson Papers, Winterthur MSS. M 2710, Roll 3. Originals in Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

38. Stauffer Collection, HSP, folder 1308.

39. John Read, Jr. to George Read II, 6 August 1803, Collection of Mrs. Philip D. Laird, now at the Historical Society of Delaware.

40. George Read II to John Read, Jr., August 1803. Read Papers, HSP.

41. George Read II to John Read, Jr., 1 September 1803. Read Papers, HSP.

42. George Read to Robert Wellford, 11 January 1804. Read Papers, HSP.

43. This catalogue was apparently used by Zane and Chapman, Wellford's predecessors, prior to their acquiring a journeyman from Jacques's shop. The ornament ordered from Zane and Chapman for the Henry Knox House in Thomaston, Maine (1794) follows the catalogue's numbering system. Once composition ornament makers from the shop came to Philadelphia, the catalogue was no longer necessary, and none of Wellford's bills of sale make reference to such a catalogue.

44. *A New Collection of Chimney Pieces, Ornamented in the Style of the Etruscan, Greek, and Roman Architecture* (London, 1781). For a brief biography of Richardson, see *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 3, 558.

45. An example of the shepherd boy scene from Petersburg, Virginia, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

46. For example, a mantelpiece in a house at Sheen, near Richmond, Surrey, in Stanley K. Ramsey and J. D. M. Harvey, *Small Georgian Houses and their Details 1750-1820* (London: Butterworth Architecture, 1923; reprint, Architectural Press, 1972), vol. II, pl. 31.

47. The Country Dance (and at least the figure of Mats) that appear in the "Jacques" catalogues are reversed from the Wellford. The Shepherd Boy is not reversed.

48. A smaller version of the country dance scene is found at the Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston. Smaller still are examples at Lemoyne House in Washington, Pennsylvania; Kerr Place, Accomac, Virginia; and the Taylor-Whittle House in Norfolk, Virginia. It is unlikely that Wellford supplied the Harrison Gray Otis ornament. It is possible that the others represent Wellford's own reduced version, but there is no proof.

49. Plate XI in the Richardson book, which was published in London in 1781. The motif appears in several Wedgwood pieces; see "Chat about Wedgwood, Old and New," *Country Life*, July 1925, p. 52; and Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood and His Works* (London: Bell and Daldy), 1873, pl. iv.

50. An English example was at No. 7 Great George Street, Bristol (in Ramsey and Harvey, *Small Georgian Houses*, pl. 38); and at an unknown house where it is executed in marble. Illustrated in Lawrence Turner, *Decorative Plasterwork in Great Britain* (London, 1927), 245.

51. The Dublin example appears in C. P. Curran, *Dublin Decorative Plasterwork of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Alec Tiranti, 1967), pl. 159. Kauffman's painting is reproduced in Wendy Wassyng Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 160. These aquatints were called "mechanical paintings." The English composition ornament manufacturer G. Jackson & Son has a mould of this scene which is very close to the Kauffman original; see Sir Lawrence Weaver, *Tradition and Modernity in Plasterwork* (London: G. Jackson & Sons, Ltd., 1928), 5.

52. On mourning pictures, see Anita Schorsch, *Mourning Becomes America: Art in the New Nation* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1976). An example similar to Wellford's, although with standing figures, is "Columbus lamenting the loss of her son, Philadelphia, 1800," in E. McSherry Fowble, *Two Centuries of Prints in America, 1680–1880: A Selective Catalogue of the Winterthur Museum Collection* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), cat. 206.

53. Anita Schorsch, in *Mourning Becomes America*, figure 46, dates this to 1811, although for unclear reasons. As "heroes" is plural, the inscription evidently references some more communal event: the War of 1812 being the most likely in Wellford's lifetime.

54. George Richardson, ed., Cesare Ripa, *Iconology* (London, 1778–79), vol. II, pl. 89. Richardson's full text is:

Moderation: "Is the contrary temper to party violence, or, the state of keeping a due mean between extremes. It is personified by the figure of a mild looking woman, decently dressed in simple white robes, in the attitude of walking peaceably between a lion and a lamb, the latter she is holding by a string, and the former by a chain. The mild countenance and simple dress, denote calmness, composure of mind, contentment, and frugality in expense. The action of holding the lion and lamb, alludes to the power of moderation, in keeping a due restraint on the unruly passions, and of managing the moral qualities with decorum, and a due degree of temperature: and may also allude to a proper medium, which should be observed in the enjoyment of all the blessings of Providence."

The scene may also allude to the Hebrew prophet Isaiah: "The calf and the young lion shall grow up together, and a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:06).

55. Richardson, ed., Ripa, vol. II, pl. 89.

56. Richardson, ed., Ripa, vol. I, pl. 33.

57. Richardson, ed., Ripa, vol. I, pl. 40. Richardson's commentary:

Reflection: In mechanicks, is the return or regressive motion of a moving body, occasioned by some obstacle which hindered it from pursuing its former direction; and in metaphysics, signifies the action of the mind upon itself. It is characterized by the figure of a matron, in a thoughtful attitude, looking upon a mirror, upon which a ray of light goes from the heart, and is reflected on the forehead. This emblem signifies that the reflection of the mind regulates the thoughts of the heart.

Only one pair of these figures survives (in Charleston), on a mantel whose center panel is signed by Wellford. As noted below, Charleston mantels sometimes exhibit a mixture of composition from different sources, so we should perhaps be wary of attributing these figures to Wellford too definitively.

58. A slightly different American version appears in the Van Dyck House, in New Castle, Delaware. An English example is a chimney piece in Skinner's Ward, No. 26 Hatton Garden,

London, in Colin Avery, ed., *Period Houses and their Details* (reprint, The Architectural Press, 1974).

59. Eliza Meteyard, *Wedgwood and his Works*, pl. V, nos. 1 and 2.

60. On the Steele House generally, see Catherine W. Bishir *et al.*, *Architects and Builders in North Carolina: A History of the Practice of Building* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69–70 and 76–78.

61. Ralph Whitelaw, *Virginia's Eastern Shore* (Richmond, Va., 1951), 1181–83.

62. If the initial slash [/] is interpreted to be a 1, the price goes to \$1.87 1/, very much higher than the Philadelphia price. Documents such as the Read House and Steele House bills (see Appendices I and II) indicate that the price of a pair of truss ornaments was generally 6 to 8 shillings, which converted to \$.80 to \$1.00.

63. The only exceptions are city directories and an 1827 sale of ornaments in Princeton, New Jersey. Significantly, these were for clocks.

64. Philadelphia Deed Book TH 167:139. My thanks to Jim Duffin for this reference.

Appendix I . Wellford's Bill of Sale for Read House, 1803

copy Philada August 23rd 1803

Mr. George Read
to Robt Welford No. 42. South 3rd Street

For Composition Ornaments for six mantles fix'd compleat

	<u>£</u>		
For 1 Tablet of the triumph of Mars returning from Battle	1	10	-
1 pair of bold festoons of flowers with fruit basket	-	15	-
1 pair of Music & Contemplation figures fix'd on pedestals	-	8	-
For fixing of ditto ornaments	-	11	3
2 tablets of Diana giving command to her hounds at 26/3 each	2	12	6
2 pair of festoons of Oak leaves with acorns etc. for friezes at 15/	1	10	-
2 pair of figures fix'd on pedestals, for the Trusses at 8/	-	16	-
For fixing of ditto Ornaments on these 2 Mantles at 11/3	1	2	6
1 Tablet of a large Country dance & Tree	1	6	3
1 pair of Rich flower friezes	-	15	-
1 pair of figures fix'd on Pedestals	-	8	-
for fixing of ditto	-	11	3
1 Tablet of an offering to Ceres & festoons of Drapery	1	2	6

From the collection of the Historical Society of Delaware. Wilmington.

1 pair of Grape festoons for the friezes	-	15	-
1 pair of Harvest boys for the Trusses	-	6	-
for fixing of ditto Ornaments	-	11	3
1 Tablet of an offering of the temple of fame to Study	1	2	6
1 pair of bold grape friezes	-	15	-
1 pair of heads of Milton & Shakespeare on pedestals	-	6	-
for fixing of ditto Ornaments	-	11	3
1 fancy tablet of the Goddess of Liberty	-	18	9
For the Man's expenses going to New Castle & back	1	17	6
(True Copy)	£	20	11 6

	\$54.87
deduct	4.87
by agreement	50.00

Philadelphia February 15th 1804 receiv'd
from George Read Esq. of New Castle by the
hand of his brother John Read Jun: Fifty
Dollars in full of the above and all accounts.

\$50

Robt Wellford

Appendix II. Zane, Chapman & Wellford Bill of Sale
to John Steele, Salisbury, North Carolina, 1800

1800	Mr. Caldcleugh	Bo ^r of Zane Chapman & Wellford
3 mo 9th	for cash	
		£ s d
1	Women figure Tablet & fruit & canopy & fixing	16 6
1	jessamine Do, & Diana Centre & fixing	18 9
1	pair of Oak freezes & Large Wheat Sheaf Centres & fix'g	18 9
1	pair of large Do, & acorn Centres & fixing	16 6
2	pair of Black Vases fix'd on boards Comp. 6/6 pr	13
2	ft of Waterleaf facia	2
9	ft of Ribbon drapery facia	10d
9	ft of Raffled Ogee & Bead	6d
9	ft of plain & tongue ovolo	10d
4 1/2	Doz of pine apples	1/Doz
4 1/2	Doz of acorns	1/doz
3	Doz of Round Roses	3/doz
		<hr/>
		£6 3
1	pr large Drapery Vases	7/6
		<hr/>
		£6 10 6
Paid for a Box to Pack do	5/-	
1 House Bell	<hr/>	
	4 6	
£6	<hr/>	
equal to Dolls. 18	15	

Received 3 mo 17th 1800 of Mr. Caldcleugh Eighteen Dollars
in full for the within Bill

for Zane Chapman & Wellford
David Livezey

From John Steele Papers, ms. no. 689, the Southern Historical Collection, the Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Appendix III. List to date of signed, documented, and attributed Wellford work in the Southeast

NOTES ON ATTRIBUTION

In attributing a work to Wellford, the following procedures and rules were used. All composition was photographed as orthogonally as possible at close range, with both horizontal and vertical scales in the picture. This allowed accurate measurements to be taken to compare two examples. Often, one ornament may look very similar to another, but its scale turns out to be different, indicating that it came from another mold. This is the case with the well-known composition ornament at the Harrison Gray Otis House in Boston: the motifs look very similar to Wellford's, but are at a different scale, indicating another (although obviously related) source, probably the Jacques shop in London or another of its spinoffs.

Composition ornament for which Wellford documents survive or that have Wellford signature plates are assumed to be from Wellford's shop. It has been suggested that Wellford may have imported ornament and merely placed his own labels on it, as was sometimes done with mirror frames¹. However, there is no evidence for this and at least some evidence to the contrary. Wellford repeatedly claimed that he made his own ornament, and nothing has been found to dispute this. Further, documents prove that he sold ornament throughout the period from 1797 to 1821, during much of which time there was an embargo between the United States and England that would have disrupted importation. It might also be claimed that Wellford may have made the ornament with molds sent or brought over from England. Again, Wellford himself claimed to be a skilled carver, and many of his motifs have no known parallels in England. Moreover, there is a stylistic affinity among all signed and documented Wellford ornament that makes it likely that they originated from the same hand.

In the case of center panels, work is attributed to Wellford if a signed or documented example is known and if an unsigned example is identical in form and scale. Several center panel scenes (mostly non-narrative) that have no signed or documented examples are also attributed to Wellford if they occur in a context that suggests that Wellford is the most likely source (such as a Philadelphia house that has other composition ornament clearly by Wellford) and if stylistically they appear to be by his hand.

Similar rules were used in the trickier case of swags, trusses and other ornament, none of which was ever signed. Documented examples provide a few touchstones. Otherwise, ornament was assumed to be by Wellford if (1) it appeared with a known Wellford center panel; (2) it appeared in a context where Wellford was the likely maker (such as in Philadelphia where Wellford had virtually no competition); and (3) it occurred more than once in such contexts.

These guidelines should ensure that little or no ornament attributed to Wellford is not by him, and may exclude ornament from his body of work that actually was by him.

¹ Philip Zimmerman, personal communication.

VIRGINIA

Accomac County

Wharton Place, c. 1800

mantel, first floor room, northwest: center tablet, tree and country dance (attrib.)

mantel, first-floor room, southwest: center tablet, Venus, Cupid tied, couple, and tree (signed)

chair rail, first-floor room, northwest (attrib.)

over-door panel, first floor room, southwest: swag, drape, and entwined cornucopias (attrib.)

millwork, first-floor room, southwest (attrib.)

mantel, second-floor room, northwest: center tablet, woman, draped, holding swags; spiral vines (signed)

mantel second-floor room, southwest: center tablet, woman w/chariot & cornucopia; sprays & vines (signed)

Petersburg

Moore House (now in Metropolitan Museum of Art), 1800

mantel: center tablet, shepherd boy with sheep and tree (attrib.)

Tappahannock

Shepherd House (originally in Belle Farm). House 1775–1800, mantel 1800–1820.

mantel: center tablet, shepherd boy with sheep and tree (attrib.)

NORTH CAROLINA

Chapel Hill

University of North Carolina President's House (orig. from Carlisle, PA), 1800–1820.

mantel: krater, spiral vines & leaf sprays (attrib.)

Littleton

Little Manor (destroyed), c. 1804

mantel (missing): center tablet, Triumph of Mars (attrib.)

mantel (missing): center tablet, tree and country dance (attrib.)

overdoors (missing): (attrib.)

Warren County

- Montmorenci (now at Winterthur), 1820
over-door panel (attrib.)
mantel, center tablet, Battle of Lake Erie (attrib.)

Raleigh

- Colonel William Polk House, c. 1815
mantel (missing): center tablet, Battle of Lake Erie (attrib.)

Salisbury

- John Steele House (with Zane and Chapman), 1800
mantel, front parlor: center tablet, two women with raised arms holding garlands
(documented)
mantel, rear parlor (now at another location): center tablet, Jessamine and Diana
(documented)

SOUTH CAROLINA

Charleston

- George Chisolm House, c. 1810
mantel, east parlor: center tablet, Cupid tied, woman, and tree (signed?)
mantel, north parlor: center tablet, swag with linked petals and quivers & birds
(attrib.)
mantel, second-floor room, north: center tablet, shepherd boy, sheep and tree
(attrib.)
mantel, second-floor room, southeast: center tablet, tree and country dance (attrib.)
mantel, second-floor room, west: center tablet, Venus, cupids and doves (attrib.)
William G. Steele House, 1815–19
mantel, second-floor room, front: center tablet, country dance; no tree (signed)

- Robert Haig House, c. 1815
mantel, first-floor room, front: center tablet, woman with cornucopia on chariot,
surrounded by spray (signed)

- Joseph Glover House (orig. at 164 St. Phillips St.), c. 1825
mantel: center tablet, shepherd boy, sheep and tree (signed)

Heyward House, 1807–25
mantel, second-floor room, front: center tablet, krater, spiral vines, and wheat sprays (attrib.)

William Gibbes House, 1807–25
mantel, second-floor room, southeast: center tablet, Venus, Cupid, and doves (attrib.)

George Hoffman House, 1816–20

Mt. Pleasant

Seaside (originally at 88 Broad St., Charleston), 1807–25
mantel: center tablet, Venus, Cupid tied, and couple (signed)

Book Reviews

Ronald L. Hurst and Jonathan Prown, *Southern Furniture 1680–1830: The Colonial Williamsburg Collection*. Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Harry N. Abrams, 1997. 639 pp., 215 color, 575 b/w illustrations, 6 maps, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$75.00, ISBN 0-8109-4175-9 (Abrams), 08-935-200-0 (Williamsburg).

If this reviewer may be permitted some hyperbole, *Southern Furniture* is the publication equivalent of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao or the Getty Center in Los Angeles: after years (if not decades) of collecting, planning, and sheer toil, the results are in the hands of the public, and they are stunning. Written by then Curator of Furniture Ronald L. Hurst and Associate Curator Jonathan Prown (now Chief Curator and Curator, respectively), this book is a selective catalogue of Colonial Williamsburg's holdings in furniture made in three distinct regions of the early South: the Chesapeake (including Tidewater Virginia and northeastern coastal North Carolina), the Low Country of North and South Carolina, and the Backcountry of Virginia and the Carolinas. With these representative examples from Williamsburg's superb collection, accompanied by the authors' lucid definition of each object's specific local characteristics, any reader can begin to navigate the once imperfectly charted terrain of Southern furniture and come away with a greatly enlarged understanding of the subject.

As the authors duly acknowledge, and as readers of the MESDA *Journal* need hardly be reminded, this book has benefitted from a distinguished heritage of publications devoted to the material culture of the region now demarcated as south of the Mason-Dixon

line, beginning with such pioneering descriptive studies as Paul H. Burroughs' *Southern Antiques* in 1931 and blossoming after World War II with the first book-length studies of specific regions, such as E. Milby Burton's 1955 *Charleston Furniture 1700–1825*. These post-war years also witnessed the first large-scale museum exhibitions devoted to the subject, among them "Baltimore Furniture 1760–1810" at the Baltimore Museum of Art in 1947 and the landmark 1952 exhibition "Southern Furniture" at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts that was co-sponsored by Colonial Williamsburg and *The Magazine ANTIQUES*. The watershed date for the present catalogue, however, was the founding of MESDA by Frank L. Horton and his mother, Theo Taliaferro, in 1965. *Southern Furniture* has been enriched immeasurably by the scholarship that has utilized MESDA's unparalleled research files on southern artisans and the objects they created.

The collection that is the subject of Hurst and Prown's catalogue is, with the sole exception of MESDA, unrivaled as an institutional collection of early southern furniture. Among its 700 examples, Colonial Williamsburg preserves major monuments of American regional furniture: four ceremonial armchairs made in Williamsburg (cats. 51–54), a sideboard table designed by William Buckland for Mount Airy in Richmond County, Virginia (cat. 79), two extraordinary china tables, also made in Williamsburg (cats. 96–97), a high chest of drawers from Frederick County, Virginia (cat. 118), and the Deas family double chest of drawers from Charleston, South Carolina (cat. 119). If this book were no further than providing the barest essentials of photographs and documentation, it would be a significant contribution to the study of American decorative arts. The catalogue section contains entries for 183 pieces of furniture, including eight long-term loans. Each is illustrated with a full-page color plate and in most cases at least one black-and-white detail of construction or decoration, together with a description of construction details. Most entries also have well-chosen illustrations of design sources or related examples in other collections. Each entry has detailed notes

on condition, materials, dimensions, marks and other inscriptions, and provenance.

Two omissions from these otherwise thorough entries are the exhibition and publication histories of individual objects. At least eight pieces in the catalogue (cats. 2, 7, 119, 128, 134, 142, 156, and 166) were included in the 1952 "Southern Furniture" exhibition at the Virginia Museum, but the entry for only one (cat. 134) makes reference to this in a footnote. Many objects in this catalogue have been published in a variety of scholarly and popular sources, and to have this recorded here would, in my opinion, do the researcher a service. Such popular books as Robert Morton's *Southern Antiques and Folk Art* of 1976 do not provide caption information with the illustrations, and the reader is forced to comb back matter to ascertain that a given object is the same one in Hurst and Prown. Moreover, I would argue that the history of a given object does not stop with its acquisition by a museum, and the record of its exhibition and publication offer invaluable insights into the history of taste and cultural appreciation. The Galt family desk and bookcase (cat. 142), for example, was exhibited in an "Art Loan Exhibition" in Norfolk as early as 1879, although this is not mentioned in its entry. Many readers may be unaware that the Charleston double chest (cat. 119) selected for the frontispiece is, not coincidentally, the single most-published object in *Southern Furniture*. Within the past two decades alone it has been illustrated and discussed in such disparate books as Wendy Cooper's *In Praise of America* (1980), Jesse Poesch's *Art of the Old South* (1983), and Morrison Heckscher and Leslie Bowman's *American Rococo* (1992).

The heart of the book is the authors' commentary on each object, which range from 750-word summaries to eight pages of double-column text (in the case of the Buckland sideboard table). These commentaries succinctly define the construction and design characteristics that attribute an object to a given marker or area, drawing on related objects with local histories and a host of other primary sources: family genealogies, probate records, church registers, and

tax lists. Hurst and Prown have synthesized over fifty years of scholarship, much of it very recent, and brought it to bear on each individual piece of furniture. Perhaps their greatest accomplishment is that only a handful of objects in this catalogue have frustrated their attempts to pinpoint their origin and retain the traditional (and formerly pejorative) designation “southern.” Some commentaries serve as mini-surveys of Colonial Williamsburg’s holdings for a given craftsman; the entries for the Johannes Spitzer chest (cat. 107) and the John Shearer desk (cat. 136) illustrate and discuss a second chest and a tall-case clock by Spitzer and a pier table and chest of drawers by Shearer, all owned by Williamsburg. As they should be, a few pieces of furniture made in England, Scotland, New England, and New York are included because of their ownership in the South.

The individual catalogue entries are organized into groups of different furniture forms—chairs, tables, case pieces, clocks, beds, and miscellaneous. The commentaries situate each type of object, such as card table or food safe, in a southern context, again drawing on a wide range of primary sources. Within each category the entries are roughly chronological, with the order (and indeed the choice of object) to some extent determined by the authors’ desire to “facilitate intraregional comparisons [between] objects from different areas of the South” (p. 47). Even given the limitations of a single museum collection, this intraregional diversity of craftsmanship and design is instantly apparent, as it is in the successive entries for four chests made circa 1800, two from Shenandoah County, Virginia, one from Virginia’s Eastern Shore, and one from the Piedmont region of North Carolina (cats. 105–108). They make abundantly clear that the South as a region boasts as many regional variations as those found in the Northeast. In this catalogue, however, such comparisons become more difficult to make in categories for which larger numbers are involved, such as chairs of the late Colonial period (cats. 10–26). Such sections might have benefitted from grouping together all the examples made in one area, such as Williamsburg or Petersburg, rather than adhering to a strict chronology.

Although the arrangement of the catalogue by furniture forms undoubtedly offers the easiest system for users to retrieve information for a given object, it also creates a few problems. The concept of using one object to represent a larger group, as in the Spitler and Shearer examples cited above, separates the supplementary illustrations from other examples of those forms. By structuring the book by forms, moreover, the authors were required to repeat information regarding local design and construction traits, such as the New York City influence or mastic-filled inlays found in Norfolk, Virginia, or the archaeological evidence documenting the work of the Hay/Bucktrout/Dickinson shop in Williamsburg (the last cited at least five times, with two citations within 27 pages of each other, pp. 212 and 239).

However one wants to quibble with details of organization or sins of omission, such decisions fade in importance when put in the balance with the wealth of new material presented in the catalogue. In fact, the great majority of these objects are new to Colonial Williamsburg: 82, or 44 percent of the total, have been acquired since 1980, with 54 of this number arriving within the last seven years. By publishing these objects, the authors have greatly enriched our understanding of the field. In addition, Hurst and Prown also engage in reconsiderations of well-known objects, such as the ceremonial armchair (cat. 52) that has been repeatedly published as a Williamsburg product, but here presented as of possibly English origin. Moreover, the design of the book by Greer Allen is not only handsome but makes it easy for the reader to move directly to comparative illustrations and related entries cited in the extensive cross-references.

The catalogue is prefaced by three essays that provide brief but enlightening overviews of the settlement and economic development of the Chesapeake, Low Country, and Back Country, written respectively by Hurst, Savage, and Prown. The authors clearly establish the distinctive character of each region, and indeed these were the same geographic divisions followed in the 1952 exhibition (which added

Savannah to the Low Country and Georgia piedmont, and eastern Kentucky to the Back Country). After reading these essays, I at first found myself second-guessing the authors and wondering why the individual entries had not been organized into regional subgroups, thereby providing a parallel artifactual narrative to the essays. However, Hurst and Prown clearly took stock of the fact that furniture from the Low Country and Back Country together accounts for less than a quarter of the total objects in the catalogue. Collection catalogues are rarely ideal vehicles for regional studies; moreover, as the references and bibliography in this book demonstrate, work is ongoing in specialized studies of different southern regions, the most recent among them the papers from the 1997 Southern Furniture conference at Colonial Williamsburg, which have been published as the 1997 volume of *American Furniture* by the Chipstone Foundation.

Southern Furniture is part of a larger group of publications focused on different categories of English and American collections at Colonial Williamsburg that began with Barry A. Greenlaw's *New England Furniture at Williamsburg* in 1974 and presently includes ceramics, costume, floor coverings, silver, and woodworking tools. To specialists in the field of decorative arts, the value of such published archives is inestimable; they make possible the more synthetic studies alluded to above. Such documentary sources have been described by some as outmoded in this age of CD-ROM and on-line catalogues, but I feel strongly that Colonial Williamsburg should be commended for continuing this publication program.

Ronald Hurst and Jonathan Prown have raised the quality of scholarship in not only regional but national furniture scholarship to a new height. No longer can anyone apply the generic term "southern" to something that does not fit into the long-established paradigms of Northeastern cabinetmaking, as the distinctive identities and diversity of Southern furniture traditions have been beautifully laid out in this book. At present there is no other single resource in print that provides the same range, depth, and quality of visual images, historical background, and analytical information on objects

made in the South. Anyone interested in American furniture who has not already acquired *Southern Furniture* and begun reading is behind the times.

DAVID L. BARQUIST

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Nancy Goyne Evans, *American Windsor Furniture: Specialized Forms*. New York: Hudson Hills Press in association with the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997. Pp. 256, 31 color, 249 black-and-white illustrations, summary, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN 1-55595-064-7.

Windsor chairs survive in seemingly endless numbers and variations. Their enormous popularity in their own time only reinforces their popularity among collectors and the general public today. They appear inviting and unencumbered by rarefied style principles and highbrow tastes, yet furniture connoisseurs are fascinated by their repetitious design and sometimes daring technology. Specialized forms of Windsors, expressing a particular convenience or need, add imagination and creativity to these attributes. Windsor chairmakers seem to have made everything and anything: chairs that incorporate writing surfaces and one or two convenient drawers, chairs that rock and invalid chairs that roll, chairs that swivel, and settees small enough to double as cradles or long enough to seat entire families. One can become giddy with the anticipation of discovery, and with good reason. Among this reviewer's favorites has to be a late eighteenth-century sack-back Windsor that in the late nineteenth century had springs attached to the front legs to create an instant rocking chair, thereby providing more boing for the buck than fitted wooden rockers (fig. 1-6o).

American Windsor Furniture: Specialized Forms is, according to the book jacket, "the indispensable companion volume" to *American*

Windsor Chairs, the immense study published in 1996 that many feel compelled to measure by its eight-and-one-half pound weight. Readers will be pleased to learn that author Nancy Evans's second volume is a very comfortable 3 pounds 7 ounces, with only a third the number of pages and illustrations of the first. The design of the book, which duplicates the earlier volume, is handsome and user-friendly. Clear illustrations are keyed to the text, allowing users ready access to technical descriptions and information. *Specialized Forms* continues Evans's detailed survey of Windsor furniture and written evidence begun so many pages ago. New readers attracted to this book must take into account that it does not stand on its own; it simply plunges into the subject matter without any general orientation to or explanation of Windsors. Materials, construction, terminology, design concepts, and other basics, readers will discover, lie in the preceding volume.

The first of three chapters—on specialized adult furniture—is 110 pages long. Successive chapters on children's furniture and on stools, stands, and miscellaneous forms are 50 and 46 pages. Because each chapter is so long, it is broken into sections ranging from 5 to 45 pages. As in *American Windsor Chairs*, each section of this second volume adheres to a strict format, with introductory comments followed by chronological developments subdivided by region. Although this organization may have helped the reader negotiate the encyclopedic amount of information in the massive, earlier study, it does not serve the reader as well in this normal-sized book. In the first section on writing-arm chairs, for example, the reader quickly encounters "the earliest known writing-arm Windsor from Philadelphia," a restored (and unillustrated) example from 1793 (p. 34). Two pages later, the reader discovers documentation of the form being made concurrently in areas of Connecticut. In another nine pages, the reader learns about parallel circumstances in Boston. Lack of integration of these sections is frustrating and, without occasional variation in organization of the material, fatiguing.

These separate narratives cover a wonderfully rich and provoca-

tive time in America and in furniture history but fail to raise more general themes and insights that may be of interest to readers. Questions that lie directly within Evans's regional approach include whether writing-arm chairs signal possible changes in prevailing patterns of urban-centered innovation, to say nothing of the decades-long dominance of Philadelphia. Provocative topics that lie outside the relatively narrow boundaries of subject matter remain unexplored. For example, Evans slips in an intriguing observation that ministers owned most writing-arm Windsors, which immediately raises broader questions of class and status associations among the many different Windsor forms (p. 52).

A delightful moment occurs when Evans quotes from a 1799 letter describing a little girl's rapture upon receiving a painted child's chair—which brings to mind the behavior of some modern collectors (p. 145). However, tedious recitation of fact after fact, object after object throughout *Specialized Forms* displaces the author's opportunity to bring to life more of the energy and creativity embodied in the engaging Windsor furniture she presents. Given the depth and scope of this book, however, this dimension may simply be too much to expect on top of the prodigious amount of information Evans pulls together. Although readers may regret missed opportunities, there is no doubt that Evans supplies the field with a comprehensive body of objects and historical evidence, systematically arranged and available for further use. Indeed, Evans has done her part. We should honor her work by regular use of and reference to her important study.

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